

# *Sustainability* **Dossier**

The Path to GSTC Certification  
(Global Sustainable Tourism Council)



Environment

Landscape,  
resources,  
climate



Social

Community,  
work,  
inclusion



Governance

Management,  
data,  
transparency



Culture

Heritage and  
identity

## THE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

# A journey built around the criteria of the GSTC for Destinations



### SECTION A Sustainable governance

Governance,  
strategy,  
monitoring



### SECTION B Socio-economic sustainability

Benefits for the  
local community



### SECTION C Cultural sustainability

Cultural heritage  
and conservation  
of the territory



### SECTION D Environmental sustainability

Resources, biodiversity,  
climate

## UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 2030



# EMILIA

La terra dello slow mix

**VIENI A  
CONOSCERLA**

The Pietra di Bismantova in the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines

**CASTELNOVO NE' MONTI**

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# 1 Introduction and context

## Why a sustainability dossier and how to achieve GSTC certification.

### 1.1 Purpose of the dossier

**T**his dossier chronicles the journey of the Visit Emilia tourist destination towards GSTC certification, with the aim of promoting the region in a virtuous manner, mitigating the negative impacts of tourism and systematically evaluating the destination's performance against international sustainable management standards.

The dossier aims to provide an updated overview of Visit Emilia's sustainability performance, highlighting ongoing dynamics and contributing to the development of increasingly informed, participatory, and long-term territorial governance. By analyzing the destination's performance, describing actions already undertaken, and identifying future improvement objectives, the document demonstrates a concrete commitment to a tourism development model capable of generating economic, social, cultural, and environmental value for the region and future generations.

The document is designed as a dynamic tool and will be reviewed annually to integrate updated socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental monitoring data and to reflect any changes in available information, strategic priorities, and destination improvement objectives.

### 1.2 The path to sustainability and GSTC certification

In recent years, Visit Emilia has progressively integrated the principles of sustainability into its institutional activities and tourism development programs. This approach has translated into the valorization of local supply chains, the promotion of slow and outdoor tourism, the support of hiking and cycling, the dissemination of authentic experiences linked to local products, and the promotion of a more balanced distribution of tourist flows between urban areas, rural territories, and the inland areas of the Apennines.

For Visit Emilia, adopting the Global Sustainable Tourism Council criteria represents not only a verification process, but above all a tool for continuous improvement, based on measurable objectives, periodic monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and transparency in decision-making processes.

The project is part of the regional policies for sustainable tourism promoted by the Emilia-Romagna Region and is inspired by the principles of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, contributing in particular to the objectives of sustainable economic growth, the valorization of cultural and natural heritage, responsible production and consumption, the fight against climate change, and the building of inclusive and resilient communities.

The analysis takes into account the complexity of the territory and its community, involving a variety of stakeholders: public bodies, tourism operators, local businesses, associations, cultural institutions, protected natural area management bodies, and citizens. The well-being of the resident community, the preservation of heritage, and the quality of the tourist experience are considered interdependent and central elements in the destination's sustainable development.

The adoption of GSTC standards allows for the development of a coherent and internationally recognized monitoring system, assessing the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism, identifying critical issues and opportunities for improvement, and supporting decision-making processes based on measurable data and indicators.

## 2 Destination Identity

A single territory that encompasses Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia: geography, community, tourist demand, and products.

### THE THREE CITIES OF THE DESTINATION



Cathedral Square  
**PARMA**



Gothic Palace  
**PIACENZA**



Piazza Prampolini, the civic center of the city  
**REGGIO EMILIA**

**V**isit Emilia is the tourism brand of Destinazione Turistica Emilia, a large-scale public entity established by the Emilia-Romagna Region pursuant to Regional Law No. 4 of March 25, 2016. The reform of the regional tourism system assigned the Tourist Destinations the task of coordinating the promotion, marketing, and tourism development of their respective territories, replacing the previous functions performed by the Provinces. Destinazione Turistica Emilia was formally established in 2017 and includes the provinces of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia.

### THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Emilia Tourist Destination's registered office is located in Parma, while its operational structure is spread across Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia, ensuring a direct presence throughout the region.

The organization is led by the President of the Authority, who chairs the Board of Directors, and by the Director, who oversees management. The organization has dedicated staff for tourism promotion, communications, administration, digital management, institutional relations, and territorial coordination. An external service dedicated to press office and digital public relations also supports the organization. The presence of expertise distributed across the three territories allows the destination to maintain ongoing relationships with local authorities, tourism operators, and stakeholders, promoting coordinated management of the tourism offering.

Over the years, the Destination has progressively expanded its role, moving from a primarily promotional function to an integrated land management model.

Today, through the Tourist Activities Programme (PAAT), the destination defines objectives, strategies, and priority actions for the promotion and enhancement of the territory.

From 2026, planning will take on a three-year horizon, strengthening medium-term planning capacity.

This is complemented by the Local Tourism Promotion Program (PTPL), the main tool through which projects, events, and initiatives promoted by participating territories and municipalities are supported. Destination planning is developed in accordance with regional strategic guidelines and represents the primary tool for guiding tourism promotion, enhancement, and development activities.

In addition to preparing the Tourist Activities Program and, within it, the Local Tourism Promotion Program, the Destination coordinates the network of tourist information offices and develops policies aimed at sustainability, monitoring flows, and enhancing the local offering.

The destination operates through the Emilia brand, which unifies the region on national and international markets. This brand is divided into three payoffs depending on the type of communication: institutional (Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia), generic (Visitemila.com), and tourism promotion (La terra dello slow mix). Since 2021, communication has been accompanied by the claim **"The Land of the Slow Mix"**, which summarizes the destination's identity as a place where cultural experiences, landscapes, traditional products, wellness, nature, and human connections are integrated into a slow, authentic, and sustainable travel experience.

Visit Emilia promotes a vision of tourism based on the quality of the experience, the valorization of local communities, and the balanced distribution of the economic, cultural, and environmental benefits generated by the tourism sector. This approach is the cornerstone of the journey toward GSTC certification and the sustainability strategies developed by the destination.



## 2.1 Geographical and administrative framework



Torrechiara Castle dominates the Parma Valley

LANGHIRANO, PARMA

The Emilia Tourist Destination is located in the western part of the Emilia-Romagna Region and encompasses the entire provinces of Piacenza, Parma, and Reggio Emilia. The region extends vertically from the Po River and the Po Valley to the crests of the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines, forming an extremely diverse landscape, environment, and culture.

With a total area of **8,326 km<sup>2</sup>**, the destination represents one of the largest territorial areas in the region. It borders Lombardy to the north, Tuscany to the south, Liguria to the southwest, and Piedmont to the west, serving as a strategic geographic hub between the Po Valley, central Italy, and major national transport routes.

The destination's territorial governance involves **123 participating entities**, including municipalities, provinces, and unions of municipalities. The resident population amounts to **1,272,905** distributed among capital cities, lowland towns, hilly areas, and Apennine areas.

### *Resident population by province and large age groups - January 1, 2026 <sup>1</sup>*

| Province      | 0-14 years | 15-64 years old | over 65 years old | Total   | Males   | Females |
|---------------|------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Piacenza      | 33.775     | 180.737         | 74.297            | 288.809 | 143.047 | 145.762 |
| Parma         | 55.350     | 296.421         | 109.877           | 461.648 | 228.024 | 233.624 |
| Reggio Emilia | 65.092     | 343.248         | 124.164           | 532.504 | 264.164 | 268.340 |

<sup>1</sup> <https://statistica.regione.emilia-romagna.it/>

One of the destination's distinctive features is its remarkable territorial diversity. Within a few kilometers, you can travel from the Po River landscapes to the countryside of the Food Valley, from the wine-growing hills to the historic villages and mountain landscapes of the Apennines. This diversity is one of the main attractions and allows for the development of complementary tourism products that are available year-round.

## NATURAL HERITAGE, PROTECTED AREAS AND INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITIONS

The Visit Emilia region stands out for the high value of its natural and cultural heritage, recognized through numerous international protection and enhancement programs. Of particular significance is the presence of **two UNESCO MAB (Man and Biosphere) Biosphere Reserves**.

**The Tuscan-Emilian Apennines Biosphere Reserve**, recognized in 2015, encompasses the provinces of Parma and Reggio Emilia and extends along the Apennine ridge between the Cisa Pass and the Forbici Pass. This area is home to an extraordinary biodiversity heritage, encompassing a significant portion of the animal species present in Italy.

**The Po Grande Biosphere Reserve**, recognized by UNESCO in 2019, encompasses all three provinces of the destination and enhances the central stretch of the Po River, characterized by riparian forests, poplar groves, wetlands, and small historic towns in the plain.

The region's international importance is further confirmed by its 2023 inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, "Karst in the Evaporites and Caves of Emilia-Romagna." Regarding the Visit Emilia region, the recognition specifically involves the Upper Secchia Valley, located within the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines National Park, and several karst systems in the Reggio Emilia hills. These environments contain unique geological phenomena of international significance and represent a significant attraction for science, nature, and tourism.

Among the UNESCO recognitions, the title of **UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy**, awarded to Parma in 2015, is particularly significant. This recognition highlights the city's role as the international capital of the Emilian Food Valley and demonstrates the excellence of the agri-food products that characterize the area, including Parmigiano Reggiano DOP, Prosciutto di Parma DOP, Culatello di Zibello DOP, Salame Felino IGP, Fungo di Borgotaro IGP, and the wines of the Parma Hills.

This heritage is complemented by other elements of cultural significance. **The Baptistery of Parma is included in the UNESCO-IAU portal** dedicated to world astronomical heritage, thanks to its unique architectural alignments with solstices, equinoxes, and religious holidays. Furthermore, the **Via Francigena**, which passes through the Piacenza and Parma areas, is the subject of an international promotion process as part of the UNESCO nominations for intangible cultural heritage.

Further enhancing this picture are several smaller but significant awards given to local villages: Compiano and Vigoleno are among the "Most Beautiful Villages in Italy," while Gualtieri has been awarded the Touring Club Italiano's Orange Flag. While smaller in scale than the UNESCO labels, these recognitions bring visibility and investment to towns otherwise at risk of depopulation, strengthening the strategy of distributing tourist flows throughout the region.

## PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM

The destination's main environmental protection area is the **Tuscan-Emilian Apennine National Park**, shared with the Tuscany Region and extending across the mountainous region of the provinces of Parma and Reggio Emilia. The park represents one of the entire region's key natural resources and is a key hub for sustainable tourism, hiking, environmental education, and biodiversity conservation.

Alongside the national park, there is a complex network of state and regional nature reserves. In the Parma area, **the Monte Prinzera, Ghirardi, Parma Morta, Torrile and Trecasali, and Stirone and Piacenziano Nature Reserves** are noteworthy; the latter also extends to the Piacenza area. In the Reggio Emilia area, the **Fontanili di Corte Valle Re Nature Reserve and the Rupe di Campotrera Nature Reserve** are particularly important.

The landscape is completed by numerous regional parks and protected river and hill areas, including the **Taro Park, the Trebbia Park, and the Boschi di Carrega Park**. These areas play a vital role in landscape and biodiversity conservation, while also enabling traditional agricultural activities, sustainable tourism, and the enhancement of resident communities.

## GEOGRAPHY, HYDROGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Geographically, the territory extends from the Po Valley, crossed by the Po River, to the crest of the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines, encompassing a remarkable variety of natural environments and landscapes. The elevation range includes the lowlands, the central plain, the hilly areas, and the Apennine mountains, creating an environmental mosaic that is one of the main distinguishing features of the destination.

Among the most representative landscapes are the **Pietra di Bismantova**, an iconic rock formation in the Reggio Emilia area also known for its Dantesque references, **the Trebbia and Nure valleys in the Piacenza area, the Alta Val Parma and Val Cedra** with their glacial lakes, and **Lago Santo Parmense**, the largest natural lake in the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines.

Hydrography is another defining feature. The Po River is the main river axis of the plain and the northern boundary of the destination. Alongside it are the Trebbia, renowned for its clear waters, the Taro, the Enza, the Secchia, the Parma, the Ceno, the Nure, and the Arda, which shape the landscape of the Apennine valleys and hills. The mountain waterways are also characterized by waterfalls, natural lakes, and environments of high naturalistic value.

Climate conditions vary significantly with altitude. The plains have a continental Po Valley climate, with hot, muggy summers and cold winters characterized by frequent fog. The hilly areas form a more temperate transition zone, while the Apennine mountains have a cooler climate, with snowfall that allows for local winter tourism in places such as Ventasso, Schia, and Prato Spilla.

From a sustainability perspective, this territorial wealth requires a constant balance between enhancement and protection. Natural areas and rural landscapes are indeed resources that define identity and are attractive, but they are also vulnerable to climate change, hydrogeological risk, pressure from traffic during peak periods, and the need for maintenance of light infrastructure.



For this reason, the destination is gradually orienting its actions towards compatible forms of enjoyment, based on information, environmental education, deseasonalization and coordination with the management bodies of the protected areas.

The regulatory framework of Regional Law No. 24 of 21 December 2017 provides an important framework for interpreting the destination's tourism development in relation to landscape protection, the prevention of hydrogeological instability, and the sustainable development of territorial resources. Indeed, it regulates the protection and use of land in Emilia-Romagna, setting among its general objectives the reduction of land consumption, the regeneration of urbanized areas, urban and ecological quality, and the integration of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies into territorial planning.

## 2.2 Community and territorial economic context

The region embodies many of the characteristics that distinguish the so-called "Emilia model," based on a high quality of life, a solid economic structure, a widespread local welfare system, and a strong tradition of civic participation and social cooperation.

**The provinces of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia consistently rank among the Italian regions with the highest levels of well-being and quality of life,** as evidenced by the main national rankings. This result is supported by a diversified economic system, combining strong manufacturing and agri-food specialization with a developed tertiary sector and a widespread network of public and private services.

Economically, the region boasts some of the **highest income levels in Emilia-Romagna**. Parma, in particular, has an average per capita income of approximately €25,400 per year, placing it among the most prosperous provinces in the region, while Reggio Emilia exceeds €22,000 per year. The labor market also historically displays strong signs of strength, thanks to the presence of important production districts in the agri-food, mechanical, mechatronics, and service sectors. Average salaries for employees are generally above the national average, **although a gender pay gap persists, consistent with the main trends observed in the rest of the country.**

The local economy is characterized by significant diversification. The primary sector accounts for an estimated 2% to 4% of total value added, while the secondary sector, including industry, construction, and manufacturing, accounts for approximately 28% to 32%. The tertiary sector contributes over 65% of total value added, including trade, services, culture, and tourism.

**Among the main economic specializations are:**

- agri-food and food processing;
- DOP and IGP products;
- mechanics and mechatronics;
- food and pharmaceutical packaging;
- biomedical;
- logistics and advanced services;
- cultural, food and wine and outdoor tourism

**Table 2.2.1 – Estimated distribution of value added by economic sector**

| Sector                                            | Estimated incidence |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Primary (agriculture, livestock farming, fishing) | 2-4%                |
| Secondary (industry, construction, crafts)        | 28-32%              |
| Tertiary sector (services, commerce, tourism)     | 65-68%              |

The region also boasts a significant educational and university heritage. Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia are home to universities, technical and professional institutes dedicated to tourism and agri-food, as well as centers of international excellence such as ALMA, the International School of Italian Cuisine.

A significant role is played by the local welfare system, which stands out for its focus on educational, healthcare, and social services. In particular, the Reggio Emilia area is internationally recognized for its child-friendly policies and the so-called "Reggio Emilia Approach," an educational model that has helped make the city a global benchmark in preschool education. More generally, the three provinces show levels of investment in personal and family services above the Italian average, contributing to high levels of social inclusion and territorial cohesion. The coverage of municipal early childhood services is also above the national average, confirming a consolidated tradition of attention to educational policies and family support.

From a demographic perspective, however, the region faces some of the major challenges facing Northern Italy as a whole. Indeed, the population is progressively aging, with a steady increase in the proportion of older residents and a simultaneous decline in birth rates. The average number of children per woman stands at around 1.2, in line with the national figure and the more general decline in the birth rate across the country. At the same time, the average family size is decreasing and the number of one- and two-person households is rising.

**The population's geographical distribution also highlights a strong concentration in the main cities and lowland areas**, where the main services, production activities, and infrastructure are located. The Apennine areas, while representing a fundamental component of the destination's landscape and cultural identity, are experiencing more marked depopulation and demographic aging. This imbalance represents one of the main regional challenges for the coming years and represents one of the areas in which tourism can help sustain the permanence of local communities and economic activities.

The presence of foreign-born residents is another defining feature of the social context. The three provinces have a higher than national average share of foreigners, consistent with Emilia-Romagna's position as one of the Italian regions with the highest incidence of foreign nationals. **Parma and Piacenza have percentages close to 15% of the resident population, while Reggio Emilia is just over 12%.**



The foreign population is predominantly concentrated in lowland municipalities and major urban centers, where they find employment in the agri-food, manufacturing, and service sectors. In addition to representing a key component of the local workforce, the presence of these communities contributes in some contexts to counteracting demographic decline and maintaining the vitality of local economic systems.

Social cohesion is one of the destination's distinctive features. **The region is characterized by a long tradition of associations and cooperatives** spanning economic, social, cultural, and sporting sectors. Worker cooperatives, social cooperatives, cooperative credit institutions, volunteer associations, and third-sector organizations are a historic component of the Emilian model and significantly contribute to the quality of social relations and the communities' ability to address collective challenges. The inclusion of people with disabilities in schools and the widespread accessibility of public services are also positive elements of the local context.

The social landscape of Emilia Tourist Destination highlights a combination of high quality of life, economic stability, good employment, and strong social capital. At the same time, some structural challenges remain, linked to an aging population, declining birth rates, the future sustainability of welfare systems, and demographic imbalances between the plains and the Apennines. In this context, sustainable tourism can contribute not only to economic growth, but also to the enhancement of local communities, the maintenance of services in inland areas, and the strengthening of territorial cohesion, generating shared benefits for residents and visitors.

## 2.3 Tourist demand: trends and main indicators

In 2025, the destination recorded approximately **1,515,850 arrivals and 3,269,502 overnight stays**, confirming a growth trend (+9.5%) compared to the previous year, the highest in the region and one of the best in northern Italy. The share of international tourism is increasing and is increasingly contributing to the region's visibility in foreign markets. The impact of tourism on the overall regional economy, still limited compared to the manufacturing and agri-food sectors but steadily growing, is explored in Chapter 5, along with its employment and social impact.

## 2.4 Tourist information and visitor reception

Hospitality is a strategic function of Visit Emilia's tourism system.

Since 2023, the destination has coordinated the network of tourist information and reception offices in the three provinces, ensuring the consistent application of regional guidelines and the integration of information services, local promotion, and visitor assistance. The network includes IAT (Tourist Information Offices), IAT-R (Tourist Information Centers), Welcome Rooms, and other information points throughout the region. In addition to providing practical information, these services play a growing role in promoting sustainable mobility, local knowledge, and responsible visitor behavior.

## 2.5 The destination's tourism products

Visit Emilia's tourism offering is organized around thematic products consistent with the local area's vocation. Since the organization's inception, it has worked to create Tourism Product Networks that have characterized the region's offerings through adherence to specific guidelines, training programs, and dedicated communication.

Here's what they are:

**Emilia Food & Wine** promotes the Food Valley and is one of the most recognizable elements of Visit Emilia's tourism identity, highlighting the concentration of products, local gastronomic culture and traditional restaurants, protection consortia, wine and flavor routes, and experiences at the production sites. Food and wine tourism helps strengthen the bond between visitors and the region, transforming traditional products into a story of supply chain, landscape, artisanal know-how, and community. There are 300 operators in the three provinces, including restaurants, retailers, producers of traditional products, guides, service providers, and accommodation providers.

**Emilia Cultura e Castelli** promotes the widespread historical, artistic, and architectural heritage of art cities, museums, historic theaters, castles, villages, and iconic locations. It is composed of theaters, museums, castles, cultural foundations, tourist guides, service providers, and accommodation providers in the three provinces, for approximately 180 members.

**Emilia Terme e Outdoor** integrates the spa offerings of Salsomaggiore, Tabiano, and Cervarezza with walking, cycling, hiking, natural areas and slow tourism, golf, and sporting events. This program represents the integration of wellness, nature, and slow mobility, showcasing the spa towns, hiking trails, cycling routes, the Apennines, and the river system. Approximately 150 members are members.

Taken together, Product Networks represent a supply-side governance tool: not only do they promote individual experiences, but they also help qualify operators, direct flows, and strengthen the coherence of the destination's sustainable positioning. This structure allows for the distribution of attractiveness across time and space, contributing to seasonal adjustment and the valorization of inland areas.



## LOCAL ECONOMY, PRODUCTION CHAINS AND IDENTITY PRODUCTS

In addition to the three thematic product networks, there are cross-cutting projects managed by member municipalities and funded by Visit Emilia and through the Local Tourism Promotion Plan. Priority products have been identified to ensure the dissemination of experiences in sectors we consider strategic for modern tourists, including **Bike Experiences, Walks, Food & Wine Experiences, Wellness/Spas, Villages and Castles, UNESCO Value, Cities of Art/Culture, MICE, and Sports.**

The typical products and supply chains of excellence that support the destination's food and wine, cultural, and outdoor tourism products, starting with the agri-food sector, represent the most distinctive expression of this area's economy.

The products associated with Parmigiano Reggiano, Parma Ham, Culatello di Zibello, Piacenza cured meats, and Traditional Balsamic Vinegar of Reggio Emilia represent not only economic excellence, but also elements that significantly contribute to the destination's image.

In terms of production, the primary sector includes cereals, fodder for livestock, milk for the Parmigiano Reggiano cheese production chain, industrial tomatoes, pig farming for PDO production, and viticulture, with particular reference to the Colli Piacentini area and the production of Lambrusco in the Reggio Emilia area. The secondary sector is strongly characterized by agri-food processing, the production of agricultural and industrial machinery, food and pharmaceutical packaging technologies, and mechanical and biomedical components. The service sector, on the other hand, includes hospitality, catering, commerce, logistics, business services, credit and insurance, as well as a growing number of activities related to experiential tourism.

The destination's identity is most clearly expressed in its typical local products, which are a key component of both the economy and tourism. Among the main certified products are Prosciutto di Parma DOP, Culatello di Zibello DOP, Piacenza DOP cured meats, Salame Felino IGP, Coppa di Parma IGP, Parmigiano Reggiano DOP, Grana Padano DOP, and Provolone Valpadana DOP. These are joined by Traditional Balsamic Vinegar of Reggio Emilia DOP, Borgotaro Mushrooms IGP, Reggio Emilia Watermelon IGP, Erbazzone Reggiano IGP, and an important winemaking heritage represented by the wines of the Colli Piacentini and Colli di Parma regions, and Lambrusco Reggiano.

In addition to its agricultural and food production, the region preserves significant artisanal traditions that contribute to its cultural identity. In the Piacenza area, a well-established tradition of wrought iron remains, linked to the production of decorative objects and furnishings, while Reggio Emilia maintains a vibrant tradition of cabinetmaking and wood inlay. Ars Canusina, a decorative art form inspired by Carolingian, Romanesque, and Matildic motifs, is particularly distinctive, applied to jewelry, furnishings, and artisanal products. In the Parma Apennines, the tradition of stoneworking also survives, linked to the historic craft of local stonemasons.

<sup>2</sup> The general economic framework of the territory - its productive structure, the driving sectors and the relative weight of tourism - is described in chapter 2.2



Although artisanal production currently has less economic weight than large agri-food and manufacturing sectors, its tourism and cultural value remains significant. **Antique markets, artisan workshops, traditional workshops, and itineraries dedicated to local knowledge enrich the visitor experience and contribute to the preservation of regional identities.** In this context, tourism plays a key role in connecting the local economy, cultural heritage, and resident communities, promoting the products, traditions, and skills that are among the distinctive elements of Emilia as a destination.





## 3 Governance, participation and destination management

The management model, the stakeholder network, participation and governance of flows.



The Farnese Palace

PIACENZA

### 3.1 The management model

Visit Emilia's governance is based on an institutional structure formalized by Emilia-Romagna Regional Law No. 4 of March 25, 2016, which established Tourist Destinations as public bodies instrumental to local authorities for the organization and management of tourism promotion across a broad area. In implementation of regional legislation, Destinazione Turistica Emilia was established by Regional Council Resolution No. 595 of May 5, 2017, acquiring legal personality and administrative, organizational, financial, and accounting autonomy.

As of December 31, 2025, the organization has 123 members from the provinces of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia. Specifically, the province of Parma is represented by 40 member organizations, including 38 municipalities, the Province of Parma, and the Unione Pedemontana Parmense; the province of Piacenza has 41 members, consisting of 40 municipalities and the Province of Piacenza; and the province of Reggio Emilia has 42 members, including 41 municipalities and the Province of Reggio Emilia.

This broad membership base ensures widespread representation of the region and allows the destination to act as a coordination tool between local institutions, economic operators, and communities. The destination's governance structure assigns clear responsibilities and oversight functions for the economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of tourism development.

The main political body is the **Shareholders' Meeting**, composed of all member organizations, which is responsible for strategic decisions, the approval of the organization's program documents, and financial instruments.

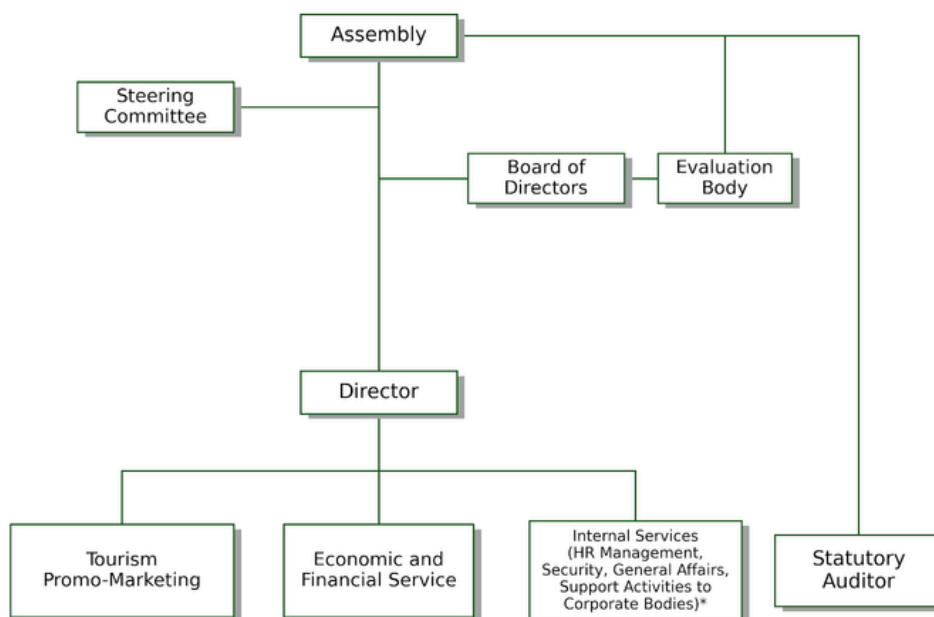
Implementation of these guidelines is entrusted to the **Board of Directors**, composed of nine administrators representing the local area, including the President, who coordinate and supervise management.

Alongside the institutional bodies, a permanent **Steering Committee** operates as the primary instrument for participation in the partnership with the business community. It is composed of ten representatives of the main economic categories linked to tourism, with voting rights, and a group of permanent guests without voting rights, representing the agri-food supply chains, protected areas, cultural associations, the conference sector, and other strategic stakeholders in the destination. This body facilitates ongoing dialogue between the public and private sectors, fostering shared development priorities and promotional activities. A Steering Committee Coordinator representing the private sector is appointed and is also invited to attend Board meetings.

Overall oversight of the management system is ensured by the Board of Directors, the Steering Committee, and the organization's Management. **The Director** coordinates operational activities and relies on a technical structure composed of internal staff and specific external expertise, including the press office and communications and digital PR activities.

The public organizational chart documents a structure composed of eight operational units distributed across the Parma, Reggio Emilia, and Piacenza offices, with formally defined roles and responsibilities.

## Organizational chart



**On the economic and financial front,** Destinazione Turistica Emilia has a structured planning and control system. The organization approves its budget annually and operates on the basis of a **multi-year budget for 2026-2028**, approved by the Shareholders' Meeting.

Revenue comes primarily from regional funding provided by Regional Law 4/2016 and from membership fees paid by member organizations. The financial control system includes audits by the Auditor, periodic monitoring of financial management, and controls on cash flow and payment schedules, ensuring financial stability and proper management of public resources.

The destination also operates through a consolidated network of institutional collaborations involving the Emilia-Romagna Region, APT Servizi Emilia-Romagna, the Emilia Chamber of Commerce, local GALs, municipalities, provinces, parks, and other local development entities. These collaborations are complemented by relationships with technical bodies and specialized entities, including the certification body responsible for verifying the GSTC certification process.

**Administrative transparency is a central principle of governance.** The Transparent Administration section of the institutional portal publishes financial statements, minutes, resolutions, planning documents, administrative acts, **the Code of Ethics, approved on April 29, 2026**, and the Corruption Prevention and Transparency Plan.

The GSTC process also included a **specific section dedicated to sustainability**, aimed at improving reporting, information accessibility, and stakeholder engagement.

**The management model is encapsulated in the Tourism Activities Program (PAAT), the destination's main planning tool. Prepared annually but within a three-year planning framework consistent with regional guidelines, the program includes strategic planning guidelines, the Tourism Promotion and Marketing Program, the Local Tourism Promotion Program, and the Financial Plan.** Its development involves the Members' Assembly, the Board of Directors, the Steering Committee, and participating private operators, ensuring a participatory approach to defining tourism policies. The destination's planning identifies priority strategic products: Bike Experiences, Walks, Food & Wine Experiences, Wellness and Spas, Villages and Castles, and UNESCO Value, complemented by cross-cutting areas such as culture, MICE, sports, and destination governance.

These resources are monitored and evaluated using specific tools to analyze climate risks, socio-economic, cultural, and environmental impacts, and sustainable development opportunities. This system helps guide strategic decisions, identify emerging critical issues, and define improvement actions consistent with the coordination and guidance role played by Destinazione Turistica Emilia.

**The governance model adopted by Visit Emilia represents a multilevel system that integrates political direction, technical management, stakeholder participation, and performance monitoring. The most recent evolution, characterized by the introduction of sustainability tools and the structuring of the GSTC process, further strengthens the destination's ability to pursue balanced, participatory, and long-term tourism development.**

## THE SUSTAINABILITY STEERING COMMITTEE

In 2026, Visit Emilia strengthened its governance system by establishing the Sustainability Steering Committee, a body dedicated to coordinating sustainability policies and supporting the GSTC certification process.

The objective of the sustainability steering committee is to integrate within destination governance skills and stakeholders who traditionally do not participate in tourism planning processes, but are crucial to sustainable territorial management. For this reason, **the Committee involves universities, research centers, protected area management bodies, mobility organizations, and stakeholders with expertise in energy, water, waste, the environment, and territorial planning.**

Through this body, the destination addresses tourism as a cross-sectoral phenomenon, recognizing that the quality of the tourist experience also depends on the functioning of transport systems, the quality of the environment, the protection of cultural heritage, climate resilience, and the quality of life of local communities.

As part of the same process, the role of **Sustainability Manager** was also formalized, with the task of coordinating the GSTC process, facilitating dialogue between the various stakeholders, and ensuring the monitoring of the actions envisaged by the destination's sustainability strategy.



This role has been identified in Director Pierangelo Romersi, supported by Mirca Bolognesi for communications and social media activities and Stefania Spaggiari for institutional relations with member organizations and organizational and secretarial activities.

## 3.2 The stakeholder network

**Stakeholder engagement is essential for the organization, as Visit Emilia does not directly manage all the destination's sites, infrastructure, services, and resources, but performs a coordination, direction, promotion, and facilitation role.**

Sustainability depends on the ability to connect stakeholders with diverse skills and complementary responsibilities: planners, promoters, hosts, conservers, producers, trainers, monitors, service managers, and those who live in the area on a daily basis. From this perspective, stakeholder mapping is not a simple list of interlocutors, but a governance tool that allows for assigning roles, strengthening collaborations, identifying responsibilities, and building a shared vision of sustainable tourism development.

Visit Emilia's stakeholder network is broad and multilevel, reflecting the very nature of the destination: a vast territory where tourism intertwines with public functions, production chains, cultural heritage, landscape, mobility, environmental services, and local communities. Destination governance is based primarily on the role of the Emilia-Romagna Region, APT Servizi, the Emilia Tourist Destination, and the regional capitals, which contribute to defining tourism promotion, planning, and coordination guidelines. These stakeholders are supported by the provinces, municipalities, and local authorities responsible for territorial development, security, civil protection, and planning and management of public services.

Regarding employment, **professional qualifications**, and **skills management**, the Regional Employment Agency and its local offices, trade associations, and economic representatives in the three provinces, including Confcommercio, Confesercenti, CNA, and Legacoop, are key. These entities oversee key issues for tourism sustainability: quality of employment, operator training, service continuity, professionalization of hospitality, business support, and connections with the cooperative, cultural, commercial, and artisanal sectors.

A key component of the stakeholder system is Visit Emilia's **tourism operators** and **product networks**. Accommodation facilities, restaurants, agritourism farms, tour operators, convention bureaus, tourist and environmental hiking guides, attractions, museums, castles, spas, outdoor services, IAT (Tourist Information Office), IAT-R (Tourist Information Centre), and Welcome Rooms constitute the operational infrastructure of the tourism experience. Through product networks, the destination connects different businesses and stakeholders, fostering shared quality standards, joint projects, training, integrated promotion, and greater coherence between the tourism product and sustainable positioning.

**Cultural heritage** involves a particularly complex system of responsibilities. At the state level, the Ministry of Culture, the competent Superintendencies for Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia, and the state museums, including the Pilotta Monumental Complex in Parma, are involved.

At the regional and local levels, the Emilia-Romagna Region, municipalities, civic museums, library systems, ecclesiastical institutions, and numerous cultural, musical, and banking foundations operate. The Arturo Toscanini Foundation, the Teatro Regio di Parma Foundation, the Palazzo Magnani Foundation, the Maramotti Collection, the Piacenza Theatre Foundation, the Cariparma Foundation, the Monte Parma Foundation, the Piacenza and Vigevano Foundation, and the Manodori Foundation each contribute, in their own way, to the conservation, cultural production, artistic programming, and promotion of the destination's tangible and intangible heritage.

**The environmental and infrastructural dimension** requires the involvement of the bodies responsible for managing natural resources, environmental quality, energy, water, waste, and mobility. The Emilia-Romagna Region, the Management Bodies for the Parks and Biodiversity of Western and Central Emilia, the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines National Park, UNESCO Reserves, Land Reclamation Consortia, AIPO, ARPAE, IREN, TEP, and SETA oversee key areas for the destination's sustainability: ecosystem protection, water quality, pollution control, waste management, energy production and distribution, hydraulic safety, public mobility, and territorial accessibility. Within this framework, energy communities and the spread of photovoltaic systems also contribute to the transition to more resilient and lower-impact consumption models.

Alongside institutional and tourism stakeholders, the destination relies on a strongly identifiable **economic and productive network**. The consortia protecting PDO and PGI products—from Parma Ham to Culatello di Zibello, from Piacenza cured meats to Parmigiano Reggiano, from Traditional Balsamic Vinegar of Reggio Emilia to the wines of the Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia Hills—are strategic partners for food and wine tourism. They are joined by local producers, farms, wineries, food museums, fairs, LAGs, artisans, and businesses linked to traditional skills such as wrought iron, wood inlay, Ars Canusina, and artistic stonework. These entities transform the visit into a supply chain experience, connecting product, landscape, skills, community, and the local story.

**The local community and the third sector** complete the stakeholder group. Local tourist boards, community cooperatives, local associations, organizations committed to sustainability, educational farms, agritourism farms, schools, hotel management schools, vocational training institutions, technical and technical institutes, universities, and centers of excellence such as ALMA contribute to building skills, transmitting knowledge, and encouraging the participation of resident communities. In the absence of indigenous minorities or formally recognized local communities, local community involvement occurs through associations, civic representatives, community organizations, and participatory processes.

### 3.3 Planning, coordination and participation

Destination planning is based on the **Tourism Activities Program**, which is composed of the **Local Tourism Promotion Program**, the **Tourism Marketing Promotion Plan**, and the **financial and planning documents** approved by the regional authorities. The program is consistent with the Emilia-Romagna Region's three-year guidelines and translates strategic priorities into projects, actions, resources, and assessment tools.

The context in which the organization operates is defined by the Three-Year Tourism Plan approved by the Emilia-Romagna Region, which defines regional objectives, shared tools, and tourism products across the three tourist destinations: in addition to DTEmilìa, there are also DTRomagna and the Territories of Bologna and Modena.

Another key plan is the Regional Tourism Promotion Agency's Annual Plan, which coordinates cross-sectoral promotion products abroad, organizes trade fairs, and manages relations with the international press. This plan, which draws on the regional plan, defines analyses, markets, targets, objectives, and operational tools to achieve the expected results. DTEmilìa collaborates closely with APT Servizi in its international promotion activities and in the implementation of joint projects.

**From 2026, programming will take on a three-year perspective, strengthening the continuity between political direction, tourism promotion, territorial coordination, and sustainability.**

The planning process is developed through discussions with member municipalities, operators participating in product networks, the Control Room, the Board of Directors, and the Shareholders' Meeting.

Participation is therefore guaranteed at various levels between public bodies, representatives of the private sector, and tourism promotion associations.

## **PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

Visit Emilia recognizes that the sustainability of a tourist destination also depends on the ability to actively involve resident communities in decision-making processes and listen to their expectations, needs, and concerns. In 2026, the destination organized:

- **9 thematic meetings** (three for each capital city): one for institutions, foundations, and economic categories, one for accommodation facilities, and finally one for organizations and businesses that could assist with data collection. The meetings served as a preparatory step for the creation of the Sustainability Steering Committee, which identified the topics to address during the meetings in the local areas.
- **15 participatory meetings were held across the three provinces**, open to citizens, businesses, associations, and representatives of local institutions. During these meetings, tourism data were presented, the objectives of the GSTC process were explained, and contributions were collected regarding mobility, tourist information, services, and sustainable development. Participation was supported by the use of dedicated digital tools, including the Mentimeter platform, which allowed for the collection and organization of observations emerging from the regional discussions.

At the same time, the destination developed a **questionnaire for residents**, receiving 441 responses, and a **survey of tourism operators**, receiving 242 responses from approximately 2,500 people contacted. The information obtained today provides further insights into the integration and improvement of future planning and strategies.

Participation not only has a consultative function, but becomes a tool for governance and continuous improvement.

The questionnaire responses allow us to combine statistical data with a qualitative analysis of perceptions, needs, and critical issues. This approach allows Visit Emilia to develop a program that better reflects the region's expectations and strengthens the legitimacy of its decisions and the development of future development strategies and the definition of the destination improvement plan.

Particular attention was also paid to the Apennine areas through the establishment of **five valley-based regional working groups**, aimed at fostering coordination between institutions, businesses, and civil society in areas characterized by greater demographic fragility but also significant opportunities for sustainable tourism development.

### 3.4 Management of tourist flows

Managing tourist flows is a strategic governance function, even though Visit Emilia does not have direct powers to regulate access to individual sites. The destination acts primarily through monitoring, orienting demand, promoting the area, and coordinating with management bodies.

The Emilia Tourist Destination's tourism system is characterized by steady growth in visitor flows, a strong diversification of offerings, and a geographical distribution that reflects the diverse landscapes and tourism products of the provinces of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia. The region combines cultural, food and wine, outdoor, spa, and hiking tourism, generating demand that is distributed throughout the year and increasingly less subject to strong seasonal concentrations.

#### Accommodation offer

The destination's accommodation capacity relies on a comprehensive network of hotels and other accommodations, catering to different demand segments and travel modes. The prevalence of non-hotel accommodations highlights a significant increase in flexible forms of hospitality, often linked to rural settings, villages, the Apennines, and experiential tourism.

**Table 3.4.1 - Accommodation facilities at the destination**

| Typology             | Number of structures | Rooms         | Beds          |
|----------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Hotel facilities     | 346                  | 10.068        | 18.781        |
| Non-hotel facilities | 3.594                | 9.669         | 27.123        |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>3.940</b>         | <b>19.737</b> | <b>45.904</b> |

At this stage, consolidated data on the total number of beds and the geographical distribution of accommodation capacity across urban, hilly, mountainous, and rural areas are not yet available. Integrating this information into future destination-monitoring activities will be essential to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between accommodation capacity, tourist flows, and territorial sustainability



Trend in tourist demand

In recent years, the destination has seen significant growth in both arrivals and overnight stays. Between 2024 and 2025, arrivals will increase by over 170,000, while overnight stays will exceed 3.2 million.

Table 3.4.2 - Evolution of tourist demand

| Indicator       | 2024      | 2025      | Var. %  |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Arrivals        | 1.344.000 | 1.515.850 | + 12,8% |
| Overnight stays | 2.985.000 | 3.269.502 | + 9,5%  |

The growth recorded highlights the destination's growing appeal, driven in particular by its food and wine, cultural heritage, castles, hiking trails, outdoor activities, and the numerous events that enliven the area throughout the year.

Tourist intensity

Tourism intensity measures the ratio between tourist flows and resident population and allows us to assess the impact of tourism on a region. Overall tourism intensity remains far from the critical thresholds of overtourism, but requires constant monitoring to ensure that growth does not lead to regional imbalances or localized pressures.

Table 3.4.3 - Tourist intensity (arrivals/residents)

| Territory          | 2024 | 2025 |
|--------------------|------|------|
| Parma              | 157% | 173% |
| Piacenza           | 96%  | 102% |
| Reggio Emilia      | 68%  | 82%  |
| Destination Emilia | 106% | 119% |

Table 3.4.4 - Tourism intensity (overnight stays/residents)

| Territory          | 2024 | 2025 |
|--------------------|------|------|
| Parma              | 349% | 375% |
| Piacenza           | 209% | 223% |
| Reggio Emilia      | 152% | 174% |
| Destination Emilia | 235% | 257% |

The data shows widespread growth across all provinces. Parma continues to have the highest level of tourism intensity, thanks to the strong cultural, food and wine positioning of the city and surrounding area. Piacenza shows intermediate values, while Reggio Emilia records the highest relative growth rates, a sign of a progressive strengthening of the province's tourist appeal.

### **Seasonality and flow distribution**

The destination exhibits a different seasonality pattern compared to traditional seaside or ski destinations. The best performances are generally recorded in spring and autumn, periods when cultural tourism, food and wine, events, and outdoor activities are particularly attractive. In the Apennine areas, however, stays tend to be concentrated more in the summer months. An analysis of the peak tourist season in 2025 confirms this distribution.

**Table 2.4.5 - Tourist arrivals in 2025**

|                     | Italians         | VAR. % in 2024 | Foreign Affairs | VAR. % in 2024 | Total            |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| January             | 64.415           | 5,3            | 17.859          | 14,4           | 82.274           |
| February            | 68.619           | 7,3            | 19.134          | -0,2           | 87.753           |
| March               | 91.282           | 9,7            | 31.655          | 2,7            | 122.937          |
| April               | 89.404           | 8,6            | 46.686          | 14,8           | 136.090          |
| May                 | 107.148          | 18             | 55.490          | 9,8            | 162.638          |
| June                | 92.851           | 16,9           | 55.835          | 19             | 148.686          |
| July                | 74.868           | 0,6            | 68.395          | 13,1           | 143.263          |
| August              | 63.490           | 13,2           | 60.610          | 19,4           | 124.100          |
| September           | 94.239           | 19,1           | 60.978          | 15,7           | 155.217          |
| October             | 90.448           | 15,5           | 51.389          | 19,7           | 141.837          |
| November            | 86.564           | 9,6            | 27.537          | 14,1           | 114.101          |
| December            | 76.793           | 20,5           | 20.161          | 11,6           | 96.954           |
| <b>Total Period</b> | <b>1.000.121</b> | <b>12,2</b>    | <b>515.729</b>  | <b>13,9</b>    | <b>1.515.850</b> |

This trend confirms the importance of shoulder seasons and demonstrates a progressive deseasonalization process pursued by Visit Emilia through the promotion of year-round tourism products. Between 2023 and 2025, a gradual distribution of flows emerges, less concentrated in the traditionally busiest tourist months and more widespread between spring and autumn, key seasons for culture, art cities, and food and wine, while the Apennines experience a greater concentration in the summer months.

**Visit Emilia's strategy therefore aims to deseasonalize and redistribute tourist flows,** highlighting hiking, cycling, river tourism along the Po River, villages, castles, the Apennines, food and wine experiences, and products accessible during the off-peak periods. In this way, the promotion aims not only to increase visitor numbers, but also to better distribute them across regions, seasons, and products.

**Flow monitoring is based on multiple sources:**

- regional statistical data on arrivals and presences,
- Data Appeal platform for sentiment and sustainability,
- Spending module for non-resident spending,
- discussion with stakeholders and feedback from operators and residents.

**The critical issues** identified today have been localized and become a management priority:

- congestion and parking during large trade fairs, concerts and demonstrations,
- summer pressure in some Apennine and river areas,
- peaks at the most attractive cultural sites during long weekends, events, and free first Sundays.

**The destination addresses these phenomena through targeted promotion, coordination with managers, advance information, and the promotion of local and seasonal alternatives.**

## 3.5 Quality of the tourist experience

The quality of the tourist experience is monitored through:

- the network of information and reception offices,
- digital communication,
- product networks,
- monitoring satisfaction and
- online reputation analysis.

Since 2023, Destinazione Turistica Emilia has coordinated the tourist offices of the provinces of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia in accordance with regional guidelines, strengthening the role of IATs, IAT-Rs, Welcome Rooms, digital IATs, and distributed IATs as points of orientation, listening, and communication with visitors.

Tourist information offices provide information on itineraries, events, museums, places of interest, accommodations, maps, brochures, transportation schedules, and local services. From a sustainability perspective, their role goes beyond simply providing hospitality: **IATs help guide visitors toward responsible behavior, provide information on lesser-known areas, promote the proper use of cultural and natural sites, and serve as a channel for collecting feedback, complaints, and information needs.**

**The listening system** integrates questionnaires at tourist offices, digital footprint analysis, sentiment monitoring, and evaluation of sociocultural sustainability indicators. These tools identify areas for improvement related to the quality of hospitality, information accessibility, mobility, site use, and overall perception of the destination.

Of particular importance is the Data Appeal platform, used to monitor visitor sentiment, destination reputation, and various indicators of territorial sustainability. Starting in 2025, the system will also include specific indices dedicated to cultural, environmental, inclusion, and public transportation aspects. This platform has proven extremely useful for completing the monitoring of activities and user satisfaction results. This data complements the numerical and qualitative analysis of arrivals and attendance, thus providing a basis for future decisions based on the characteristics of operators in various sectors. The platform can also be customized to take into account the members of Visit Emilia's Product Networks, allowing us to understand whether they better meet tourist expectations and whether they are already proving more sustainable.

Added to these tools is the Spending module, based on aggregated Visa transaction data (Mastercard from July 2026), which allows for the analysis of visitor spending by geographic origin and economic sector, helping to improve understanding of the economic impacts generated by tourism.

The quality of the experience is also linked to **consistent communication**. The "Emilia is like you" campaign, the "The land of the slow mix" slogan, the website, social media, newsletter, press office activities, and promotional materials translate the destination's values into messages geared toward conscious, slow tourism that respects communities and places.

**The Responsible Visitor Charter and the Responsible Tourist Manual**, currently being distributed, complement this system, providing practical guidance on how to behave during your visit.

The quality of the experience thus becomes an indicator of the governance's ability to connect promotion, information, sustainability, and visitor satisfaction.

### 3.6 Impact analysis, risk management and resilience of the Destination

Impact and risk analysis is a key tool in the sustainable management system adopted by Visit Emilia. The destination views tourism not only as a driver of economic development, but also as a phenomenon capable of producing widespread effects on the region, local communities, cultural heritage, ecosystems, and the quality of life of residents. For this reason, as part of the GSTC process, a structured analysis system has been developed that allows for the identification, assessment, and monitoring of both the impacts generated by tourism and the risk factors that could affect the achievement of the destination's sustainable development goals.

**The analysis provides the knowledge base used to define strategic priorities, guide monitoring activities, identify actions for the Improvement Plan, and support the destination's decision-making processes.**



## ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The analysis underscores the pivotal role of tourism as a catalyst for economic development in the Visit Emilia region. The primary advantages encompass the **generation of direct employment** within the hospitality, catering, tourism intermediation, cultural activities, and tourism-related services sectors. Additionally, there is a substantial **indirect contribution from the agri-food supply chains, crafts, commerce, mobility**, and various support activities throughout the region.

Tourism plays a crucial role in **promoting local products, DOP and IGP certifications, and the culinary and vinous identity** of the Food Valley, serving as one of the destination's primary distinguishing characteristics. Additionally, tourism aids in the **economic diversification of rural and mountainous regions**, generating entrepreneurial opportunities and supporting the sustainability of businesses that may otherwise be more vulnerable.

However, certain **aspects require ongoing monitoring**. The seasonality of specific tourism segments may result in fluctuations in economic and employment trends, while the increasing challenge of sourcing qualified personnel poses a widespread issue for numerous destinations. Consequently, the destination regards investments in training, professional qualifications, and skills development as strategic priorities.

## SOCIAL IMPACTS

From a social perspective, the analysis underscores a significant alignment between tourism development and the quality of life for resident communities. At present, **there are no notable occurrences of gentrification, displacement of residents from historic centers, or diminished access to essential services** associated with tourism growth. Furthermore, the impact of tourism on public spaces and urban infrastructure seems to be largely contained.

A public figure supports this interpretation: Destination Emilia is not listed among the "red zones" of the Overall Index of Tourist Overcrowding (ICST), created by the Demoskopika Institute utilizing ISTAT and ISPRA data for the years 2025-2026. The ten Italian provinces most susceptible to this phenomenon—Rimini, Venice, Bolzano, Livorno, Naples, Milan, Trento, Rome, Verona, and Trieste—do not encompass any of the three provinces within the destination.

The most notable positive effects encompass **enhancing the economic and social vitality of local communities, generating employment opportunities, bolstering commercial activities, and expanding avenues for cultural exchange between residents and visitors**. In numerous regions, tourism also plays a crucial role in sustaining services and activities that hold considerable significance for the local population.

The **primary critical issues** pertain to temporary and localized circumstances. Certain high-traffic events may lead to traffic congestion, heightened noise levels, and extensive utilization of public spaces. Likewise, the presence of seasonal employment necessitates ongoing oversight of job quality and employment stability.

## CULTURAL IMPACTS

Cultural heritage constitutes one of the primary resources of the destination and is among the elements most impacted by tourism. Nevertheless, the analysis presents an overall favorable outlook. In fact, there are no prevalent instances of cultural trivialization, loss of authenticity, or alteration of local traditions solely for tourism purposes. On the contrary, tourism plays a crucial role in the preservation and enhancement of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Revenue generated from visitors aids in the restoration, maintenance, and promotion of cultural assets, while events, festivals, exhibitions, and local initiatives encourage the transmission of local traditions and the reinforcement of communities' cultural identity.

Tourism plays a crucial role in **promoting traditional products, local crafts, culinary excellence, and the extensive cultural networks** that define the regions of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

From an environmental standpoint, tourism presently places **moderate pressure on the destination's natural resources**. The most notable concerns involve water and energy consumption in accommodations and tourism services, waste generation, and emissions related to visitor mobility. Although these issues do not currently signify structural criticalities, they necessitate continuous monitoring and represent a central focus for the destination's sustainability policies.

However, the effects associated with land use, habitat fragmentation, water pollution, and wildlife disturbance are relatively constrained and do not presently present significant challenges at a regional level.

The analysis underscores the **potential beneficial impact of tourism** on environmental protection. The advancement of sustainable outdoor experiences, the enhancement of environmental education, and the improvement of protected areas can foster greater environmental awareness among both visitors and residents, thereby bolstering efforts to conserve natural heritage.

## RISK ASSESSMENT AND VULNERABILITY ELEMENTS

In addition to the effects produced by tourism, the destination observes a range of external factors that may affect the competitiveness and sustainability of the region in the medium to long term.

In **economic terms**, the primary risk factors encompass potential international crises, health emergencies, geopolitical instability, and the ramifications of climate change, all of which could affect tourism demand and visitor spending capacity. The destination also observes the fluctuations in business operating costs and potential speculative trends associated with the real estate market.

From a **social perspective**, a primary area of concern is territorial **accessibility**. Effective connections between urban centers, rural regions, and the Apennine areas are vital for enhancing tourism competitiveness and improving the quality of life for residents. Likewise, significant events necessitate meticulous traffic management to avert temporary congestion.

**The risks linked to climate change** are notably substantial. The analysis performed by Visit Emilia identified eight key phenomena: heat waves, droughts, extreme weather events, forest fires, biodiversity loss, heightened energy consumption, alterations in tourism seasonality, and landscape degradation. For each risk, monitoring indicators, responsible entities, and potential adaptation strategies were delineated.

From a **governance** perspective, the destination's growth underscores the necessity of enhancing monitoring tools and ensuring the availability of current, reliable data to facilitate timely, evidence-based decision-making. Risk communication has become an increasingly vital domain. Visit Emilia consolidates and disseminates information generated by the institutional system, making it more accessible to visitors, particularly through content focused on safety, civil protection, weather alerts, emergency contacts, and responsible conduct. The network of tourist information offices establishes a direct line of communication with visitors in the area, while hospitality operators, guides, and event organizers serve as crucial partners in delivering timely and comprehensible information.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

The analysis extends beyond merely identifying risks; it also emphasizes various development opportunities. These include:

- **the revitalization of underutilized buildings and**
- **spaces, the improvement of internal areas,**
- **the enhancement of traditional productions and regional supply chains,**
- **the expansion of outdoor tourism,**
- **the proactive preservation of cultural and natural heritage and**
- **enhancing territorial accessibility.**

The GSTC process has notably enhanced the destination's governance system through the implementation of new monitoring tools, the fortification of strategic planning, and increased engagement of stakeholders and local communities.

<sup>3</sup> For additional information regarding climate risk, please refer to paragraph 7.5.

### 3.7 Management and Mitigation Strategies

In light of the conducted analysis, Visit Emilia is directing its efforts towards reinforcing positive impacts while mitigating potential negative effects and risks through:

- enhancing the sustainability monitoring framework;
- investments in the training and certification of tourism operators;
- promotion of sustainable and off-peak tourism;
- incentive for the advancement of sustainable mobility and regional accessibility;
- promotion of regional supply chains and traditional products;
- preservation of cultural and natural heritage;
- continuous engagement of stakeholders and local communities in decision-making processes;
- integration of climate and environmental objectives into tourism development policies

A particular aspect of the analysis addresses climate risks, which directly inform tourism planning, trail management, outdoor infrastructure maintenance, visitor safety, and preventive communication. The matrix of the eight phenomena monitored by the destination, along with the corresponding adaptation strategies, is elaborated upon in Chapter 7, to which the reader is directed.



## 4 Sustainability strategy and destination development vision

The vision shared, the priority strategic and the integration from the sustainability in tourism policies.



Via Francigena

EMILIA-ROMAGNA

### 4.1 A shared vision and strategic objectives for sustainable tourism

Visit Emilia's sustainability strategy stems from the awareness that the destination's future competitiveness will depend on its ability to preserve the cultural, environmental, and social resources that are the region's main attraction.

In a destination characterized by strong economic diversification and a tourism pressure still far from the levels of the main Italian destinations subject to overtourism, the challenge is not to manage already problematic growth, but rather to proactively and consciously govern the evolution of tourism flows and investments.

Visit Emilia's vision is based on the concept expressed by its territorial positioning, “**The Land of the Slow Mix**”, which proposes a model of enjoyment based on the quality of the experience, slowness, authentic relationships, the valorization of local identities, and the balanced distribution of benefits throughout the region. From this perspective, tourism is viewed not as an end in itself, but as a tool for territorial development capable of strengthening local economies, sustaining cultural and natural heritage, and improving the quality of life of resident communities.

Joining the GSTC program formalizes this vision. By applying the Global Sustainable Tourism Council's international standards, the destination intends to equip itself with permanent monitoring, management, and continuous improvement tools, integrating sustainability into its regular planning and management activities.

As part of this process, the destination has developed specific analysis and monitoring tools, including:

- stakeholder mapping;
- the territorial participation system;
- the analysis of impacts, risks and opportunities;
- monitoring tourist flows;
- climate risk analysis;
- the definition of sustainability indicators and objectives;
- strengthening reporting mechanisms.

The GSTC certification process also allows us to view sustainability not as a separate area from promotion, but as a cross-cutting criterion that guides planning, flow management, community relations, supply chain development, cultural and natural heritage protection, communication, and continuous improvement. Sustainability becomes the method through which Visit Emilia decides how to grow, which products to promote, which impacts to monitor, and which responsibilities to share with stakeholders.

**The strategic objectives develop over a multi-year horizon and are linked to the regional tourism planning, the Tourism Activities Program, the Local Tourism Promotion Program, and the certification process.** The destination intends to strengthen sustainable governance, consolidate the monitoring system, expand the involvement of businesses, residents, and visitors, support the dissemination of sustainability standards and certifications among operators, improve the territorial and seasonal distribution of traffic, promote low-impact mobility, reduce consumption and emissions, and integrate climate adaptation and environmental protection into tourism development decisions.

**A central element of the strategy is the shift from a primarily promotional approach to an integrated destination management approach.** This means that growth in tourism is not assessed solely in terms of arrivals, overnight stays and visibility, but also in terms of the quality of employment, the distribution of economic benefits, the ability to protect sensitive sites, the appropriate enjoyment of

cultural heritage, residents' perceptions, visitor satisfaction and the reduction of environmental impacts. The indicators, baselines, and targets for the three-year period 2026-2028 therefore form the basis for making the strategy verifiable and progressively improvable.

## 4.2 Strategic priorities of the destination and integration of sustainability into tourism policies

Visit Emilia's strategic priorities stem from the self-assessment process developed as part of the GSTC certification process, the analysis of tourism impacts, the assessment of climate and territorial risks, the monitoring of tourist flows, and ongoing dialogue with stakeholders, economic operators, public bodies, and resident communities. Consultation activities conducted locally, questionnaires for operators and residents, and the monitoring systems adopted by the destination have allowed us to identify a series of priority areas on which to focus the destination's sustainable development strategy.

**The first priority concerns the consolidation of governance and the monitoring system.** Visit Emilia has strengthened its management capacity through the establishment of the Sustainability Steering Committee, the appointment of a Sustainability Manager, and the introduction of increasingly advanced data collection and analysis tools. The destination now has an integrated system that combines statistical data on tourist flows, sustainability indicators, digital reputation analysis, visitor spending monitoring, surveys of operators and residents, impact analysis, and climate risk assessment. This approach allows strategic decisions to be guided by objective evidence and transforms monitoring into an operational tool for destination governance.

A second priority concerns the **involvement of tourism businesses in the sustainable transition process**. The survey conducted among approximately 2,500 local operators, the meetings held in the three provinces, and the discussion activities developed as part of the GSTC process have highlighted a growing awareness of sustainability issues, but also the need to further strengthen support, training, and dissemination of best practices. For this reason, Visit Emilia has already launched information courses dedicated to GSTC standards, developed support materials, and promoted initiatives aimed at encouraging the adoption of sustainable management systems and voluntary certifications, with particular attention to accommodation facilities, restaurants, tour operators, guides, attractions, and those active in the conference and event sector.

Particular attention is also paid to **engaging local communities**, recognized as key players in the destination's development. Participatory meetings held in the three provinces and a questionnaire addressed to residents gathered information regarding mobility, tourism services, information, sustainability, and quality of life. This discussion clearly highlights the need for ongoing dialogue with local communities, especially in inland and Apennine areas, where tourism can be an important tool for combating depopulation, enhancing local resources, and strengthening social cohesion.

Another strategic area concerns the **balanced management of tourist flows**. Although the region does not experience any structural overtourism, the growth in arrivals and stays necessitates the development of increasingly effective tools for monitoring, distributing, and adjusting demand seasonally. The destination strategy therefore aims to promote a more balanced distribution of visitors across the three provinces and throughout the year, promoting products and regions capable of capturing new segments of demand, including hiking, cycling, river tourism, the Apennines, villages, castles, spas, outdoor experiences, and food and wine. The goal is to maximize the economic benefits of tourism while avoiding excessive pressure on the most popular sites and local infrastructure.

Protecting and enhancing **cultural, natural, and productive heritage** is another key priority of Visit Emilia's strategy. Heritage is the main distinguishing and competitive element of a destination and includes museums, castles, theaters, villages, historic trails, protected areas, rural landscapes, traditions, DOP and IGP products, crafts, and intangible heritage. From this perspective, sustainability is not just about preserving existing resources, but also about ensuring that the value generated by tourism contributes concretely to preserving local identities, supporting regional supply chains, and safeguarding the stakeholders who preserve that heritage.

Finally, the **environmental and climate dimension** is playing an increasingly central role in destination planning. The analyses developed as part of the GSTC process have highlighted the need to integrate issues such as sustainable mobility, energy efficiency, use of renewable energy sources, waste reduction, monitoring of water consumption, reduction of climate-altering emissions, protection of biodiversity, and proper use of natural areas—examined in detail in Chapter 7—along with climate risks, which are progressively being integrated into destination planning and management processes.

These priorities are not implemented through programs separate from the destination's ordinary governance, but are integrated into the tools already used by Visit Emilia. The Tourist Activities Program (PAAT), the Local Tourism Promotion Program (PTPL), the Food & Wine, Culture & Castles, and Spa & Outdoor product networks, the coordination of the network of IAT offices, communication activities, monitoring systems, and territorial projects represent the main tools through which sustainability is translated into concrete actions.

Communication also plays a key role in implementing the strategy. The Visit Emilia brand, the "The Land of the Slow Mix" positioning, the "Emilia is like you" campaign, digital activities, the Responsible Visitor Charter, and informational materials for operators are used to promote responsible behavior and enhance a tourism model based on respect for communities, cultural heritage, and natural resources. These tools will be complemented, once published, by the Responsible Tourist Manual, already prepared by the destination (see section 8.3).

The strategy is also part of a broader framework of territorial policies and institutional collaboration involving the Emilia-Romagna Region, APT Servizi, municipalities, GAL, the Chamber of Commerce, park management bodies, mobility organizations, environmental stakeholders, and the European D3HUB project dedicated to the green and digital transition of tourist destinations.

In this way, sustainability becomes a cross-cutting principle that progressively guides all destination policies and is updated through a continuous process of planning, stakeholder engagement, monitoring, reporting, and improvement.

The decision to certify the Destination also emerged from the growing awareness of this issue in the public and private sectors. Below are some significant ongoing projects, although not exhaustive, given the impact they bring to the region:

- **Barilla S.p.A.** Sustainability Report and creation of the Barilla Foundation Savings Guide (6 million copies in print and digital format);
- Sustainability Report of **Mutti S.p.A.**;
- 2025 Sustainability Report of the **Municipality of Piacenza** (Sustainable Municipalities Network)
- **RES-HUB.it** laboratory on sustainable business development at the Catholic University of Piacenza.
- Sustainability Report of the **TEP of Parma**;
- Parma and Reggio Emilia awarded by Legambiente as **green cities** in 2024;
- The **University of Parma's** Sustainable University Project, involving faculty and students;
- **Confindustria** Reggio Emilia's support service for sustainability initiatives for member companies;
- Reggio Emilia's **Urban Transformative Agenda** for Sustainable Development: a tool defined by the Region to implement the ecological transition in urban areas;
- **Reggio 2030**: a municipal plan for a more attractive, sustainable, and inclusive city;
- **Sustainable Unimore**: a space dedicated to the policies, actions, and initiatives of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia on environmental, social, and economic sustainability;
- **The Parma Sostenibile project** | Parma Sostenibile Social Promotion Association APS: dissemination of economic practices and models based on environmental and social sustainability;
- **MAB Unesco PO Grande R.O.B.I.N. project**: a sustainable mobility connection project along the Po River between Emilia and Lombardy with a bike and boat interchange;
- Sustainability Report of **SETA S.p.A.**, an Emilian transport company.
- Annual Integrated Report of **IREN S.p.A.**, a company that manages waste collection and disposal and the water cycle of the 3 Provinces, specifying the Strategy, Governance, and stakeholders for environmental, social, and governance sustainability;
- The Il Valore sei TU project by the **Pro Loco of Emilia-Romagna**, which outlines guidelines for sustainable events;
- **Emilia's cycling tourism projects**, from the Food Valley Bike to a cycling holiday in Emilia with Itinera Bike, to the Chef Tours in Emilia event organized by Tourissimo;
- The **StreetArt Emilia** project promotes street art in three regional capitals, officially recognized as projects for the redevelopment and enhancement of peripheral urban areas.



- The **Erasmus Visit Emilia project**, which involved 80 students from schools located in the Emilia region as ambassadors for slow tourism in the Netherlands, France, and Spain.
- The **Appennino Emilia project** was created in collaboration with the GALs del Ducato and the Reggio Emilia Apennines for the sustainable tourism development of our Apennines through Leader+ funds.

## TOWARDS THE NEXT GOALS

In addition to the activities already underway, the GSTC process has allowed us to identify several areas for improvement that will represent the destination's main areas of work in the coming years.

One priority is the public dissemination of the monitoring system's results: although the destination already has advanced data and indicators, the goal is to strengthen feedback mechanisms for citizens, operators, and stakeholders, making the collected information more accessible and promoting transparency in the decision-making process.

A second area concerns expanding the involvement of local communities, particularly through tools and materials specifically dedicated to residents, to raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges associated with sustainable tourism development.

Regarding businesses, the destination intends to increase the number of operators involved in sustainability and certification programs, encouraging the adoption of responsible management systems. Opportunities for improvement have also been identified in the collection and analysis of data relating to several emerging phenomena, including the evolution of short-term tourist rentals, measuring the carrying capacity of certain sensitive areas, and monitoring specific impacts generated by tourist flows. Particular attention will be paid to the systematic integration of climate change into tourism planning, gradually moving from a phase of analysis and monitoring to the full integration of climate resilience into tourism product management, event planning, and destination promotion activities.

From this perspective, the GSTC process is not considered a goal, but rather a permanent tool for improvement that will accompany the destination's evolution in the medium and long term. The operational details of these areas for improvement—with indicators, targets, and those responsible for each action—are reported in Chapter 8.3.

Furthermore, some projects are being implemented that see the Authority coordinating with the local community on the following issues:

- New GAL agreement to promote the Emilian Apennines and the establishment of five new valley tables for ongoing discussions on sustainable tourism development.
- DTEmilias is a partner in the approved European project OLEAVIA in the call for proposals [Supporting sustainable competitiveness of tourism SME \(SMP-COSME-2026-TOURSME-01\)](#), another significant result in this case for the promotion of sustainable olive production linked to tourism experiences integrated with other local productions.
- DTEmilias is a member of the technical committee of the Tourism Observatory of the Polytechnic University of Milan.
- DTEmilias collaborates with the Regional Tourism CLUST-ER on several projects of national and international importance.

# 5 Economic and social value for the territory

Local economy and supply chains, jobs and skills, quality of life, inclusion and accessibility.

## THE SIGNATURE SUPPLY CHAINS OF THE FOOD VALLEY



Food Museums  
PARMA



Parmigiano Reggiano DOP, a product that represents the destination's identity  
FOOD VALLEY

## 5.1 Economy, employment and local supply chains

For Visit Emilia, tourism represents a lever for economic diversification and strengthening regional identity. The three provinces of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia are characterized by a robust economy, based on manufacturing, agri-food, mechanical engineering, mechatronics, advanced services, and export-based supply chains. In this context, tourism is not yet the dominant sector, as is the case in other regional areas with a stronger seaside vocation, but it is taking on a growing role as a complementary component, capable of generating direct and indirect value, supporting the region's reputation, and creating connections between businesses, culture, the environment, and local communities.

The combined GDP of the three provinces exceeds €50 billion, and the overall tourism contribution, including domestic and international tourism, is estimated at between 0.8% and 1.5% of the regional GDP. This data confirms that the destination is not structurally dependent on tourism, but at the same time highlights significant room for growth.

The foreign component, estimated based on foreign visitors and average regional spending, generates a growing contribution: in 2025, total visitors reached 3,269,502, and the foreign share is estimated to increase compared to the previous year. The economic value of tourism must therefore be interpreted not only in terms of direct spending, but also in its reputational impact on the local agri-food, cultural, and manufacturing sectors.

The tourism offering is broad and widespread. Chamber of Commerce data considered in the reporting process indicate that **over 10,400 tourism-related businesses operate in the destination area**, including approximately 1,100 in the hospitality sector, over 8,600 in the food and beverage sector, and the remainder in the hospitality, cultural services, guides, incoming operators, attractions, and experience-based businesses. This structure confirms that **tourism operates as a cross-cutting supply chain**: it involves commerce, agriculture, crafts, culture, mobility, events, the trade fair system, and professional services. The sustainability challenge lies in ensuring that the growth in tourism flows translates into distributed and lasting benefits, avoiding concentrations and imbalances between regions or categories of operators.

**Tourism plays a particularly important role in enhancing rural and Apennine areas**, where the integration of agriculture, hospitality, outdoor activities, and local experiences fosters the creation of economic opportunities that complement traditional activities. In many contexts, tourism contributes not only to increasing business revenues but also to maintaining services and activities that are strategically important to local communities.

In terms of employment, tourism exhibits varying dynamics across provinces. Economic reports from the Regional Employment Agency indicate a positive tourism balance for 2025 in Parma and Piacenza, while a more critical trend in Reggio Emilia is evident, confirming a growing yet still heterogeneous sector. Job quality remains a priority: growing visitor numbers do not automatically generate stable, skilled, and continuous employment. For this reason, **the destination is linking its sustainability journey to training, career opportunities, skills development, and the dissemination of ethical commitments among operators**.

Training is a key lever for strengthening the social value of tourism. Visit Emilia has launched programs for product network operators, with meetings on digital tools, artificial intelligence, guest experience, sustainable tourism, and cultural tourism. This is complemented by a partnership with ITS Academy Turismo Emilia-Romagna for the 2026-2028 period, which aims to strengthen the connection between the education system and tourism businesses. The region also boasts a diverse educational ecosystem, comprising hotel management schools, technical institutes for tourism, IAL (Italian Institute of Advanced Studies), ITS (Italian Technical Institutes), universities, ALMA (Italian National Institute of Advanced Studies), and professional training programs in cooking, hospitality, agri-food promotion, mobility, and experiential tourism.

The GSTC standard requires a substantial portion of the region's tourism businesses—accommodation facilities, tour operators, MICE venues, attractions, and food and beverage services—to be certified according to internationally or nationally recognized sustainability standards. This goal is being pursued by the destination through the **establishment of the Emilia Convention Bureau**, also designed to encourage certification of participating establishments, and a two-year training program for local hospitality businesses, promoted by Visit Emilia.

## 5.2 Work, training and skills development

The quality of the tourist experience depends largely on the skills of the operators working in the destination. For this reason, Visit Emilia considers training an essential tool for economic and social sustainability.

The analysis conducted as part of the GSTC program highlights how one of the sector's main challenges is the availability of qualified personnel. The difficulty in recruiting skills and the seasonal nature of some activities necessitate investment in ongoing training, professional development, and strengthening the connection between the education system and the labor market.

The region boasts a particularly diverse educational ecosystem. Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia are home to **professional institutes for tourism and hospitality**, vocational training institutions, ITS Academies, universities, and internationally renowned centers of excellence. Among these, ALMA, the International School of Italian Cuisine in Colorno, plays a particularly significant role, recognized as one of the most important gastronomic training centers in the country.

In 2026, Visit Emilia also formalized its **collaboration with ITS Turismo Emilia-Romagna**, further strengthening the existing connection between higher technical education and the university system and the needs of local businesses. At the same time, training courses were launched for product network operators on sustainability, digitalization, innovation, artificial intelligence applied to tourism, and the evolution of GSTC standards. Training for network operators, IAT offices, and key municipal representatives has been provided annually since 2020 between February and March. This training is offered in a blended format, sometimes in person and sometimes online, with industry experts, allowing for an exchange of opinions and experiences.

### EMPLOYMENT IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

Employment analysis is a strategic element for understanding tourism's contribution to the local economy.

#### Annual data (2025) on employment in tourism in the Province of Parma.

In 2025, tourism in Parma maintained a positive employment trend. Companies in the sector continue to value flexibility, particularly through intermittent work, which drove growth especially in the last quarter of the year.

#### Summary table (2025, province of Parma)

| Indicator                    | Dependent work | Intermittent work | Total tourism sector |
|------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Activations (last 12 months) | 7.940          | 4.509             | 12.449               |
| Annual balance               | +96            | +112              | +208                 |
| Balance IV quarter           | +80            | +135              | +214                 |

**Strengths:** the tourism sector in Parma shows employment stability throughout the year, with positive annual and quarterly balances for both the dependent and intermittent component.

**Opportunities:** growth and widespread use of temporary work confirm that Parma's tourism businesses can leverage this flexibility to quickly adapt to changing demand.

**Risks:** despite the positive trend, the high incidence of intermittent work compared to traditional employee work, especially in the increase in the last quarter (+135 intermittent workers versus +80 employees), highlights a strong reliance on flexible contracts compared to more stable employment solutions.

**Annual data (2025) on employment in tourism in the Province of Reggio Emilia**

In 2025, tourism in Reggio Emilia experienced a decidedly negative employment trend, particularly affected by the sharp decline in temporary contracts. Businesses in the sector are experiencing a significant decline compared to the robust growth seen at the regional level, necessitating targeted strategies to reverse the downward trend for both permanent and flexible workers.

*Summary table (2025, province of Reggio Emilia)*

| Indicator                    | Dependent work | Intermittent work | Total tourism sector |
|------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Activations (last 12 months) | 5.660          | 4.741             | 10.401               |
| Annual balance               | -24            | -160              | -184                 |
| Balance IV quarter           | -75            | -57               | -132                 |

**Risks:** the sharp quarterly contraction in job positions (-132 overall units in tourism, of which -75 in dependent work and -57 in intermittent work) highlights a marked and widespread difficulty in maintaining employment in the sector.

**Annual data (2025) on employment in tourism in the Province of Piacenza**

In 2025, tourism in Piacenza maintained positive employment growth, thanks primarily to intermittent work. Alongside enhancing flexibility, there is a need to evaluate strategies to further stabilize employment.

*Summary table (2025, province of Piacenza)*

| Indicator                    | Dependent work | Intermittent work | Total tourism sector |
|------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Activations (last 12 months) | 3.379          | 2.972             | 6.351                |
| Annual balance               | +65            | +60               | +125                 |
| Balance IV quarter           | -29            | +52               | +23                  |



**Strengths:** the tourism sector in Piacenza shows employment stability despite the uncertain economic context, with positive annual and quarterly balances.

**Opportunity:** the growth of intermittent work suggests that tourism businesses can leverage this flexibility to quickly adapt to changes in demand.

**Risks:** the contraction in "traditional" employee positions (-29 units in the quarter) indicates a possible difficulty in stabilizing employment in the sector.

## 5.3 Tourism, resident communities and quality of life

The relationship between tourism and resident communities is a key element of destination sustainability. Visit Emilia is currently experiencing healthy growth, far from structural overtourism, yet dynamic enough to require preventive attention. The main critical issues do not concern widespread and permanent pressure, but rather localized phenomena: traffic and parking peaks during major events, fairs, and concerts; increased summer traffic in some Apennine and river areas; and potential future tensions related to short-term rentals, employment quality, and the transformation of retail offerings in historic city centers.

Engaging residents allows us to assess the effects of tourism not only in economic terms, but also in terms of quality of life, mobility, use of public spaces, perception of local identity, and accessibility of services. In 2026, the destination promoted 15 participatory meetings in the three provinces and collected 441 responses through a questionnaire addressed to residents. The topics addressed—tourist information, mobility, services, and sustainability—reflect a vision of tourism as a phenomenon that impacts the daily lives of communities and must therefore be governed openly, listening to needs, expectations, and concerns.

Tourism can generate particularly significant social benefits in inland, hilly, and Apennine areas, where the presence of trails, outdoor itineraries, villages, local products, and rural tourism helps maintain vital economies and services that would otherwise risk weakening. Deseasonalization thus also becomes a social policy: attracting visitors during the shoulder seasons means supporting businesses, communities, and local organizations during traditionally less dynamic months. In this context, sustainable tourism is called upon to strengthen cohesion, local pride, and a sense of belonging, without transforming places into mere stage sets devoid of connection to their inhabitants.

The destination also recognizes the need to strengthen the channels through which businesses, visitors, and citizens can contribute to community and sustainability initiatives. Collaborations with GALs, municipalities, associations, businesses, and third-sector entities demonstrate a consolidated institutional capacity to launch shared projects. However, the GSTC process also highlights the opportunity to make community initiatives more visible and accessible, complete the inventory of existing experiences, activate voluntary participation tools, and develop a sustainability calendar capable of engaging residents, operators, and visitors responsibly.

## 5.4 Inclusion, accessibility and safety

Inclusion, accessibility, and safety are essential conditions for tourism to generate social value and not new forms of exclusion.

The Visit Emilia destination boasts a significant set of best practices: regional regulations for the IAT network requiring compliance with accessibility regulations, municipal plans for the elimination of architectural barriers, accessible itineraries, inclusive cultural services, public transportation with progressively adapted vehicles and stops, initiatives dedicated to people with sensory disabilities, and specific interventions at cultural and event venues.

The principle of “**tourism for all**”, however, requires moving beyond the logic of individual best practices and building a consistent information system. Visitors must be able to know before departure the accessibility of museums, castles, itineraries, tourist offices, transportation, restrooms, parking, and accommodations. Among the improvement objectives the destination has set itself is a progressive, updated, and easily accessible census, capable of making accessibility an integral part of the quality of the experience.

To date, we can confirm that the destination offers good accessibility, both physically and sensory-wise, starting with the capital cities of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia, whose administrations have committed to complying with the law in relation to the Plan for the Elimination of Architectural Barriers (PEBA).

Specifically, the Municipality of Parma has entrusted the design of the PEBA with an initial phase dedicated to "Places of Culture and their Connections": cultural buildings, over 30 km of pedestrian paths, squares, crossings, and public transport stops. The critical areas mapped also include important city green areas: Parco Ducale, Cittadella, Parco Falcone e Borsellino, and Piazzale Pablo, as well as 66 km of sidewalks and roads and 22 cultural buildings. On a positive note, a hearing loop system was recently installed at the Teatro Regio to facilitate listening for the hearing impaired and those with cochlear implants.

In Piacenza, the plan initially focuses on the historic center, the so-called "public city": pedestrian walkways will be analyzed to address narrow or damaged sidewalks, the lack of safe crossings, and other obstacles, with the goal of connecting the main public buildings and strategic areas of the city. Public building interventions will include schools, theaters, municipal offices, and cultural spaces such as the Palazzo Gotico and the Teatro Municipale, with ramps, elevators, and inclusive signage.

The PEBA in Reggio Emilia is part of the city's broader and historic inclusion program, known as Reggio Emilia City Without Barriers. This tool serves to map, plan, and finance targeted interventions to make public buildings, museums, schools, and urban spaces accessible to all. Specific interventions are also underway, such as at the Palazzo dei Musei, where an initial project on signage, tactile maps, and tactile pathways, funded by the PNRR, was presented in January 2026.

To facilitate accessibility information for tourist attractions, more information is available in the specific "Emilia Accessibile" section of the [visitemilia.com](https://visitemilia.com) website.

Security is managed through a multi-level system involving municipalities, local police, Civil Protection, Local Health Authority (ASL), 118, law enforcement agencies, and event managers. Visit Emilia does not directly perform public order or health functions, but acts as a liaison and information provider for visitors and operators. This role is particularly important at large events and in high-traffic areas, where the quality of the experience depends on the ability to coordinate mobility, access, communication, medical facilities, and flow management.

Looking ahead, the destination intends to strengthen the communication chain with visitors in case of emergencies, making information channels clearer and simpler.

Visit Emilia's Code of Ethics, approved in 2026, defines commitments for the organization, participating operators, suppliers, and partners, including equal opportunities, non-discrimination, workplace safety, decent pay, combating exploitation and harassment, reporting channels, and graduated measures in the event of violations. This tool connects the social value of tourism not only to the visitor experience, but also to the quality of the economic and professional relationships that support the destination.

## 5.5 Promotion of local production

Local products—the rich concentration of PDO and PGI products in the Food Valley, already described in Chapter 2.5—represent one of the main ways in which tourism generates economic, cultural, and social value in the destination. These are not just commercial goods, but expressions of landscape, knowledge, disciplines, professional communities, and local identity, which tourism helps enhance and make economically sustainable over time.

Promoting local produce for tourism allows a greater share of spending to be retained locally, strengthening short supply chains, agricultural businesses, protection consortia, shops, restaurants, markets, food museums, wineries, dairies, prosciutto producers, and experiential operators. Food & Wine networks and related initiatives, such as Emilia Wine Experience, Emilia Food Valley, and traditional food and wine events, allow visitors to build a supply chain experience, where tasting, visiting, purchasing, and regional stories become part of a single sustainable narrative.

Alongside food and agriculture, traditional local crafts—wrought iron, wood inlay, Ars Canusina, and stone carving—while not having the same economic weight as the large food supply chains, play a significant cultural role that tourism can help maintain by promoting visitor circuits, informed purchasing, demonstrations, workshops, local museums, and direct relationships between visitors and artisans.

**Support for local businesses is provided primarily through promotion, product networks, trade fairs, workshops, educational tours, press offices, digital channels, and institutional collaborations.** Visit Emilia does not directly provide investment funding, but acts as a facilitator between businesses and entities capable of activating resources, such as LAGs, Parks, the Chamber of Commerce, European programs, and ECTS programs. This model is consistent with the organization's mandate: to connect operators, supply chains, and opportunities, strengthening market access and businesses' ability to integrate into the tourism value chain.

Looking ahead, the economic sustainability of a destination will depend on its ability to increasingly track the benefits generated by tourism: visitor spending, employment, regional distribution of revenue, SME involvement, certifications, local purchasing, impact on events, and community returns. In this sense, GSTC certification offers a useful framework for moving from a narrative valorization of local excellence to a more structured reporting of the value generated, guiding future choices toward tourism that strengthens the local economy without compromising identity, rights, quality of employment, and social cohesion.

## 6 Cultural heritage and regional identity

Historical, monumental, UNESCO, and intangible heritage serve as a defining characteristic of the destination.

### HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE



The Romanesque Collegiate Church of Santa Maria Assunta  
**CASTELL'ARQUATO**



The Basilica of Our Lady of Ghiara  
**REGGIO EMILIA**



Maosone's Labyrinth  
**PARMA**

### 6.1 Cultural heritage as a defining characteristic of the destination

Cultural heritage represents a fundamental aspect of Visit Emilia's identity and competitive advantage. The historical narratives of the provinces of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia have fostered a rich cultural network over time, which includes artistic cities, monumental architecture, castles, theaters, music venues, museums, libraries, archives, manufacturing traditions, and intangible heritage that continue to significantly influence the region's identity today.

Unlike many destinations that focus their allure on a limited number of prominent sites, Visit Emilia distinguishes itself through its rich and extensive heritage. Historic villages, castles, churches, cultural landscapes, local museums, and cultural institutions coexist alongside major attractions recognized both nationally and internationally, resulting in a diverse and comprehensive offering. This feature is a significant aspect of sustainability, as it encourages the distribution of tourist flows and facilitates the promotion of even lesser-known regions.

Cultural tourism is thus a vital element of destination positioning and is intricately linked with other components that define the Visit Emilia model: gastronomy, traditional products, landscapes, slow tourism, and local communities. From this viewpoint, cultural heritage is not merely regarded as a collection of attractions to be visited, but as a dynamic resource that plays a significant role in shaping territorial identity and enhancing community well-being.

## 6.2 Cultural heritage protection and governance framework

The preservation and enhancement of the destination's cultural heritage rely on a multifaceted network of public and private organizations functioning at different institutional tiers.

At the national level, conservation activities fall under the purview of the Ministry of Culture and the Superintendencies of Archaeology, Fine Arts, and Landscape, which are responsible for the territories of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia. These entities are tasked with safeguarding cultural heritage and supervising conservation and enhancement initiatives.

At the regional level, the Emilia-Romagna Region bolsters the cultural system through programming, funding, and coordination initiatives directed at museums, theaters, libraries, archives, and cultural institutions. Concurrently, municipal administrations, dioceses, ecclesiastical entities, and various cultural foundations play a vital role in the management and promotion of local heritage. Visit Emilia does not engage in direct protection functions; instead, it serves as a tourism coordination and promotion agency. By collaborating with cultural heritage managers, foundations, museums, theaters, and local associations, the destination advocates for the sustainable utilization of heritage and encourages the integration of cultural and tourism development. The cultural foundations in the region, such as the Teatro Regio di Parma Foundation, the Arturo Toscanini Foundation, the Palazzo Magnani Foundation, the Piacenza Theater Foundation, the Piacenza and Vigevano Foundation, the Cariparma Foundation, the Monte Parma Foundation, and the Manodori Foundation, also play a significant role in the cultural production, conservation, and promotion of numerous assets and activities.

On the protection front, Italia Nostra's "Red List" highlights several properties in the province of Piacenza that are at risk of abandonment or deterioration, including the former Albergo San Marco, the former fruit and vegetable market, and the Torre dei Ghezzi in Farini. In contrast, there are no active reports for the provinces of Parma and Reggio Emilia. The threat of theft and illicit excavations persists: in 2025, multiple Carabinieri operations resulted in the recovery of stolen archaeological artifacts in Piacenza and San Polo d'Enza, located in the province of Reggio Emilia.

## 6.3 Historical, monumental, and museum heritage

The historical and monumental heritage represents one of the most distinctive features of Visit Emilia's cultural offerings.

Parma boasts some of the most significant monumental complexes in Northern Italy, including the Pilotta Monumental Complex, which encompasses the Farnese Theater, the National Gallery, the Palatine Library, and the National Archaeological Museum. This includes the Cathedral, the Baptistery, the Chamber of Saint Paul and its associated complex, as well as numerous structures tied to the history of the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza. Noteworthy is the sustainable restoration of the former park of the San Paolo complex, the Church of Saint Francis, and the Civil Hospitals, which have been reintroduced to the city and its visitors.



Piacenza is distinguished by a rich heritage of historical and artistic significance, exemplified by landmarks such as Palazzo Farnese, Piazza Cavalli, the Cathedral, Santa Maria di Campagna, the Collegio Alberoni, and numerous noble palaces that reflect the city's pivotal role in the political and cultural history of northern Italy. Renowned as the city of 100 churches, Piacenza's historic center is marked by these ecclesiastical structures, a legacy partly attributed to the passage of the Via Francigena. Noteworthy developments include the restoration of the former Church of Carmine, now functioning as an Open Laboratory, and the modernization of the city's parks.

Reggio Emilia, conversely, is intricately connected to the history of the Italian Tricolor and retains significant evidence of its historical evolution through the Tricolor Museum, the Basilica della Ghiara, the Civic Museums, and the architectural heritage of the historic center. Noteworthy is the restoration of the Cloisters of St. Peter and various city squares, including Piazza Fontanesi, which feature substantial integration into the public green spaces.

Alongside the prominent urban cultural centers, the region boasts an extensive network of civic museums, food museums, ecomuseums, local collections, and interpretation centers that articulate the productive, social, and cultural identities of local communities. Emilia's museum network is notably rich and significant, encompassing thousands of years of history, serving as a testament to an ancient land that honors its roots while aspiring towards a future characterized by balanced and sustainable growth.

## 6.4 Fortresses, heritage villages, and cultural landscapes



The medieval settlement and the Visconti Fortress

CASTELL'ARQUATO, VAL D'ARDA

One of the defining characteristics of the destination's cultural heritage is the remarkable proliferation of castles, fortresses, parish churches, and historic villages.

Of particular significance is the network of **Castelli del Ducato**, coordinated by the eponymous Association, a collaborator in various initiatives. This network links numerous historic residences throughout Parma and Piacenza, forming one of the principal cultural and tourism networks in western Emilia. These monumental complexes serve not only as tourist attractions but also as testaments to the region's political, military, and social history. Several of these sites offer accommodations and event facilities while maintaining their historic character.

Simultaneously, the network of **Castelli Matildici and historic villages in the Apennines** enhances inland areas and rural territories. In these settings, cultural heritage is intricately linked with the landscape, local traditions, and economic activities, fostering experiences that merge culture, gastronomy, nature, and sustainable tourism.

The preservation of these sites constitutes a strategic priority for the destination, acknowledging their significance in shaping territorial identity and equitably distributing the benefits of tourism across the region.

## 6.5 Music, theatre, and performing arts

Music serves as a fundamental characteristic of Visit Emilia and plays a crucial role in enhancing the destination's global reputation.

Parma is inextricably linked to **Giuseppe Verdi** and hosts the **Teatro Regio**, one of Italy's most esteemed opera houses. The Verdi Festival stands as one of the region's most significant cultural events, drawing visitors from various countries to Parma and Busseto.

Another pivotal figure is Arturo Toscanini, whose cultural legacy is championed by the **Arturo Toscanini Foundation** and various initiatives focused on symphonic music and contemporary artistic endeavors.

Reggio Emilia hosts internationally acclaimed institutions, including the **Palazzo Magnani Foundation, the Maramotti Collection, and the Aterballetto National Choreographic Center**. In contrast, Piacenza enhances the region's cultural vibrancy with the **Municipal Theater** and the Theater Foundation, both of which offer a diverse array of events and festivals.

Equally significant are the numerous Jazz festivals and the summer concert schedule, which now serve as national events in the three cities.

The integration of these cultural institutions positions music, theater, and the performing arts as vital elements of the destination's tourism portfolio, enhancing the deseasonalization and qualification of demand.

## 6.6 UNESCO world heritage and global recognition

The cultural and environmental importance of the region is underscored by numerous international accolades.

Parma has been designated by UNESCO as a **Creative City of Gastronomy**, affirming the pivotal role of culinary culture in shaping local identity and enhancing the global profile of the Food Valley.

The destination is also influenced by the existence of two significant **UNESCO Biosphere Reserves**:

- Tuscan-Emilian Apennines Biosphere Reserve; Po
- Grande Biosphere Reserve.

Complementing these recognitions is the UNESCO site of the **Karst in the Evaporites and Caves of the Northern Apennines**, which encompasses a portion of the Emilia region and enhances the natural and scientific significance of the destination.

Another significant aspect is the **Via Francigena**, one of Europe's principal cultural routes, which crosses the region, fostering the growth of slow tourism, walking, and sustainable methods to appreciate its heritage.

These awards enhance the destination's global visibility and contribute to reinforcing the connection between conservation, promotion, and sustainable tourism development.

## 6.7 Intangible heritage, traditions, and local wisdom

In addition to its tangible heritage, Visit Emilia safeguards a notably rich and diverse intangible heritage. **Gastronomic traditions** are perhaps the most recognized manifestation of this heritage. Recipes, production techniques, agricultural practices, and knowledge transmitted through generations constitute a vital aspect of local identity and enhance the destination's international standing.

**Traditional craftsmanship** also safeguards the knowledge and skills that define the region. Notably, the aforementioned Ars Canusina, along with artistic ironwork, wood inlay, stonework, and other artisanal creations intimately connected to the local culture, hold particular significance.

**Popular festivals, fairs, historical reenactments, traditional markets, and local events** enrich the intangible heritage, fostering connections among community, memory, and territory. Tourism significantly contributes to the preservation of these heritages, promoting the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and generating economic opportunities that support their sustainability. Notable examples include the Matildic Historical Parade in Quattro Castella and the medieval reenactments in Grazzano Visconti.

## 6.8 Cultural tourism and sustainability

Visit Emilia's strategy regards cultural heritage as a valuable resource to be enhanced while preserving its authenticity, integrity, and capacity for transmission to future generations.

The impact analysis undertaken within the framework of the GSTC process underscores the generally positive effects of tourism on the cultural heritage of the destination. It contributes to the preservation of assets, fortifies cultural activities, and enriches local identities. At present, there are no prevalent issues of cultural trivialization or authenticity loss; however, the destination's growth demands ongoing vigilance regarding these matters. Consequently, Visit Emilia advocates for a distributed and sustainable cultural experience, promoting the exploration of smaller sites in conjunction with major attractions, enhancing villages and rural areas, and fostering the active participation of communities in shaping the tourism experience.

From this perspective, cultural heritage serves not only as an economic asset but also as a vital component of the quality of life for local communities and the overall sustainability of the destination.



## 7 Environment, landscape and climate initiatives

Natural heritage, sustainable transportation, resource management and consumption, climate action and adaptation.



Yellow gold: Malvasia di Candia from Piacenza

TIDONE VALLEY, PIACENTINE HILLS

### 7.1 Natural Heritage

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, the destination does not directly oversee the protected natural areas; operational management and ecological monitoring are the responsibilities of the relevant management authorities—the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines National Park Authority, the Management Body for Parks and Biodiversity of Western Emilia, and that of Central Emilia—as well as the Emilia-Romagna Region, which coordinates the territorial system of protected areas and the 158 Natura 2000 Network sites located within the region, encompassing a total area of approximately 270,000 hectares.



Visitor management in natural sites adheres to distinct regulations for each region. In the river parks of Western Emilia—Taro, Stirone, and Trebbia—access to the riverbed is restricted from March to July to safeguard nesting birds; the Le Chiesuole Natural Area, which is under a higher level of protection, is open only on weekends. **Protected areas are further categorized by their level of protection**, and when significant issues arise within the trail network, management authorities may execute targeted interventions, including the temporary closure of the affected trail.

In the realm of invasive alien species prevention, the **HUMANITA project's botanical surveys chronicle** the changes in the prevalence of non-native species at the monitored destination sites, offering a scientific foundation to inform containment strategies employed by the relevant management authorities.

**The conservation of wildlife is founded on a three-tier regulatory framework:** first, National Law No. 157 of 1992, which serves as a comprehensive law for the protection of warm-blooded fauna and the regulation of hunting, complemented by regional and local implementing legislation. In a similar vein, animal welfare is governed by Law No. 189 of July 20, 2004, which incorporated into the Criminal Code the offenses aimed at safeguarding animals from any form of mistreatment (Articles 544-bis et seq.), and by Emilia-Romagna Regional Law No. 5 of February 17, 2005, which enacts its principles at the local level.

All three Park Management Authorities have initiated the CETS (European Charter for Sustainable Tourism) certification process, designed to qualify the services of park-based operators and guide them toward certification. Some parks have successfully completed the process, while one has commenced it. Numerous local businesses are already CETS certified, thereby fostering the proliferation of a culture of sustainability.

DTEmilias engaged actively in all three projects, showcasing its strong collaboration with local park authorities and years of planning focused on sustainability.

## 7.2 Sustainable mobility

Public transportation in the region is overseen by two primary operators: TEP S.p.A. for the city and province of Parma, and SETA for the provinces of Piacenza and Reggio Emilia. Both companies have embraced formal sustainability commitments: in February 2021, TEP ratified a Sustainability Policy that incorporates environmental, social, and governance objectives, while SETA maintains an ISO 14001-certified Environmental Policy, accompanied by regular environmental audits.

In terms of quantified objectives, **SETA has pledged, as part of the PNRR, to deploy 33 zero-emission vehicles by June 2026** (comprising 12 hydrogen-powered vehicles for Modena and 21 electric vehicles for Reggio Emilia and Piacenza). Meanwhile, TIL Econoleggio of Reggio Emilia intends to neutralize 100% of its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030 through the acquisition of sustainability credits associated with the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve of the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines.

**The results attained by TEP Parma validate the chosen direction: between 2022 and 2024, the fleet's pollutant emissions have decreased markedly** (NO<sub>x</sub> from 42.47 to 20.84 tonnes; particulate matter from 0.58 to 0.14 tonnes; carbon monoxide from 8.65 to 3.69 tonnes).

Completing the picture of urban mobility is Infomobility S.p.A., a company entirely owned by the Municipality of Parma, which since 2001 has managed on-street parking, structured parking facilities, and various urban mobility services.

In accordance with the GSTC standard, which mandates a sustainable mobility policy featuring specific objectives and a substantial proportion of rental vehicles and tour buses focused on low-impact solutions, **the destination has formalized policies from the primary operators**. However, the aggregate data regarding the share of low-impact vehicles is only partially accessible, sourced from Infomobility Parma and TIL Econoleggio Reggio Emilia.

The three provinces are served by three Provincial Mobility Agencies that establish strategies and objectives while selecting public transport operators through a tender process. Under the guidance of the Region and the Provinces, they have enacted the principles of sustainable mobility and comprehensive service delivery.

DTEmilìa has presented a project to the Emilia Chamber of Commerce aimed at establishing a new sustainable mobility service. This initiative will facilitate car-free access to Emilian villages through a combination of rail, bus, and supplementary integrated private services, offering on-demand transportation to remote villages, castles, and museums. Although this is a pilot project, it carries significant strategic importance for the region as it engages businesses, universities, property owners' associations, and mobility agencies.

## 7.3 Resources and Consumption

### ENERGY

**The regional and municipal territory is already dedicated to minimizing energy consumption, enhancing efficiency, and advancing renewable energy.**

The 2023 ARPAE data present a revised overview of the distribution of energy consumption from renewable and fossil fuel sources in Emilia-Romagna. At the municipal level, Parma has embraced the "Climate Neutral 2030" goal, as outlined in the 2023-2025 Single Programming Document, while the Municipality of Reggio Emilia releases an annual environmental report detailing its consumption data.

**In the realm of renewable energy generation, the region boasts practical experience:** CER Emilia Ovest, a renewable energy community initiated by Legacoop in the Parma Nord area, generates 1.3 GWh annually via the Ravadese photovoltaic system (1 MW, featuring 1,700 panels installed on a former landfill) and the Stalla Sociale San Martino system (374 kW, with 900 panels on an asbestos-remediated roof). The agri-food sector also plays a significant role: the Parmigiano Reggiano Consortium produces energy through a photovoltaic system at its headquarters, which meets approximately 60% of its internal energy consumption.

### WATER

Concerning water, the Emilia Tourist Destination conducted a survey of approximately 2,500 accommodation facilities in the region at the end of February 2026, garnering 242 responses. The findings indicate a still inadequately organized baseline: **merely 4% of the responding establishments reported tracking their water consumption, in contrast to 55% for energy monitoring.**

This data now serves as the foundation for the destination's awareness-raising priorities, including a best-practice **guide that delineates methods for implementing or verifying low-water consumption systems in facilities, alongside promoting energy conservation and waste management.**

**Water quality control and the management of purification plants continue to be the responsibility of the Iren Group's integrated water service providers:** Iren Acqua Piacenza (serving 271,499 residents, with approximately 31 million cubic meters withdrawn for drinking water), Iren Acqua Reggio (serving 514,061 residents), and IRETI for Parma. These functions are not included among the operational responsibilities of Destinazione Turistica Emilia, which serves as a promotional and coordinating entity.

## WASTE

Waste production is tracked by the ARPAE waste webbook, which estimates that **total municipal waste generation in Emilia-Romagna reached 2,977,305 tons in 2024, reflecting an increase compared to 2023.**

The 2022-2027 Regional Waste Management Plan emphasizes waste prevention and the recovery of materials and energy, positioning landfill disposal as a last resort. As the service provider, **Iren Group aims to enhance separate waste collection from 72.1% in 2024 to 80% by 2040 in its traditional service areas, and from 65.5% to 74% in other regions.**

As part of the European Adrion project, a focused analysis was conducted on waste generation and the proportion of waste collected separately in the municipalities of the Lower Emilian Po River basin, encompassing regions within the three destination provinces.

## 7.4 Climate Initiatives

Climate-altering emissions monitoring relies on two resources provided by ARPAE: the Emilia-Romagna Emissions Inventory, categorized by municipality and pertaining to 2019, which was developed in accordance with the EMEP-CORINAIR methodology, and the 2018 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory by municipality, formulated based on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) methodology.

Concerning light and noise pollution, the region is governed by a comprehensive regulatory framework. Emilia-Romagna Regional Law No. 19, enacted on September 29, 2003, advocates for the mitigation of light pollution and associated energy consumption, while safeguarding the scientific and educational endeavors of the region's astronomical observatories. This is further supported by noise regulations, which are similarly organized at the regional, state, and municipal levels.

It is noteworthy that a significant initiative is being undertaken by several prominent businesses in Parma, all situated along the highway. They have pledged to improve the green space between the highway and their headquarters. Dubbed **KilometroVerdeParma**, the project substantially reduces the environmental impact of the area and, most importantly, serves as a model for the entire region on how to invest in its green spaces.

## 7.5 Climate vulnerability of traditional tourism products

Visit Emilia presents a comprehensive analysis of climate risks, identifying eight phenomena pertinent to the region. For each phenomenon, the accompanying matrix outlines the anticipated impact on the destination, the associated risk, potential opportunities, adaptation strategies, and indicators for ongoing monitoring.

| Climate topic          | Impact on the destination                | Risk to the destination                                       | Opportunity                                | Adaptation measures                                                                         | Monitoring indicators                                        |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Heat waves             | Increase in summer temperatures          | Reduced visitor well-being, health risks, shorter stays       | Extension of the spring and autumn seasons | Shaded areas, increased urban greenery, public fountains, advance communication to visitors | No. of days >35°C; health reports; monthly/seasonal visitors |
| Drought                | Reduced water availability               | Conflicts between residents and tourists, service limitations | Innovation in water resource management    | Water management plan, rainwater harvesting, wastewater reuse, awareness campaigns          | Water consumption per tourist; % water recovered             |
| Extreme weather events | Damage to infrastructure and attractions | Temporary closures, restoration costs                         | Investments in climate resilience          | Climate risk management plan, warning systems, emergency procedures                         | No. of extreme events; restoration times                     |
| Wildfires              | Loss of natural habitats                 | Closure of protected areas (parks), landscape damage          | Improved forest/park management            | Fire prevention plans, vegetation maintenance, monitoring of sensitive areas                | No. of fires; hectares affected                              |
| Biodiversity loss      | Ecosystem degradation                    | Reduced appeal of nature tourism                              | Promotion of nature tourism                | Habitat conservation, invasive species control, ecological restoration programs             | Habitat conservation status                                  |

| Climate topic                              | Impact on the destination                    | Risk to the destination                            | Opportunity                                                      | Adaptation measures                                                                     | Monitoring indicators                   |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Increase in energy consumption for cooling | Higher energy demand                         | Rising operational costs and emissions             | Energy efficiency and renewable-energy incentives                | Building retrofitting, renewable energy, environmental certifications                   | Energy consumption for tourist          |
| Change in seasonality                      | Shift in tourist flows                       | Overcrowding in some periods and decline in others | Diversification of the tourism offer; emerging areas of interest | Promotion of cultural, hillside, rural, outdoor and MICE tourism during shoulder months | Monthly distribution of overnight stays |
| Landscape deterioration                    | Reduced perceived quality of the destination | Loss of competitiveness                            | Territorial regeneration                                         | Landscape planning and integrated destination management                                | Visitor satisfaction levels             |

This analysis of climate phenomena is enhanced by a vulnerability assessment tailored to each destination's tourism product, considering the level of exposure to anticipated phenomena, the product's sensitivity to impacts, and its available adaptive capacity. **The distribution of offerings across the plains, hills, and Apennines serves as a significant factor of resilience**, as it mitigates reliance on a single product or season; however, each product faces varying degrees of exposure to the effects of climate change.

#### **Food and wine tourism and Food Valley — moderate vulnerability.**

The primary attractions—culinary museums, dairies, vinegar producers, prosciutto makers, wineries, and traditional restaurants—are distributed throughout the year and are not directly influenced by weather conditions. However, **the principal risks arise from the impacts of climate change on the agri-food supply chains** that characterize the region's offerings: drought, heat waves, and extreme weather events can affect the availability of raw materials, production costs, and, over time, certain quality attributes of traditional products. Conversely, the gradual rise in temperatures during the shoulder seasons may promote further growth in food and wine tourism during spring and autumn, aiding in the deseasonalization of visitor flows.



### **Cultural tourism and artistic cities — moderate vulnerability**

Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia demonstrate moderate vulnerability, with **primary concerns centered on increasing summer temperatures and heat waves** that may diminish visitor comfort and affect the utilization of urban spaces. Concurrently, severe weather events can inflict damage on historical and artistic heritage, leading to elevated maintenance costs and temporary usage restrictions. Additionally, the rising inclination among visitors to steer clear of destinations facing extreme summer heat could render Emilian cities even more appealing during the spring and autumn seasons.

### **Castles, historic villages, and extensive heritage — medium-high vulnerability**

**The vulnerability of the castelli del Ducato and historic villages is chiefly associated with the rising frequency of intense rainfall, flooding, and hydrogeological instability**, which can jeopardize their accessibility, safety, and preservation. Special emphasis must be placed on the preventative maintenance of historic structures and the management of adjacent areas, particularly in the hilly and Apennine regions.

### **Cycle tourism — moderate to high vulnerability**

Cycling tourism, one of the fastest-growing segments of the destination, is also **particularly vulnerable to climate impacts**: summer heat waves can considerably diminish the usability of routes during the hottest months, while extreme weather events and localized landslides can jeopardize infrastructure and pathways. Nevertheless, **the extension of mild seasons presents intriguing opportunities** for prolonging the cycling season, particularly between March and June and from September to November.

### **Walking and slow tourism — significant vulnerability**

The historic routes, including the Via Francigena, the Via Matildica del Volto Santo, and various other hiking trails, are significantly influenced by environmental conditions. Rising temperatures, the threat of wildfires, and an increase in landslides in hilly and mountainous regions can directly affect the **safety and accessibility of these trails**. Nevertheless, this vulnerability is counterbalanced by the increasing demand for slow tourism and genuine nature experiences, which constitutes one of the primary opportunities for the destination.

### **Nature-based tourism and the Apennines — significant vulnerability**

The Apennine regions are the **most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change**: increasing temperatures, alterations in hydrological patterns, forest fires, and biodiversity decline can profoundly affect the ecosystems that support the allure of tourism, while hydrogeological instability may jeopardize trails, shelters, infrastructure, and connectivity. Nevertheless, **the rising interest in outdoor tourism and nature-based well-being presents promising opportunities** for sustainable development in mountainous areas, contingent upon the implementation of suitable adaptation strategies.

### **Thermal and wellness tourism — moderate vulnerability**

Spa resorts face **vulnerabilities primarily concerning water availability and heightened energy consumption** for cooling facilities. Nevertheless, the sector stands to gain from the rising demand for wellness, health, and quality-of-life services, thereby reinforcing its position within the annual tourism portfolio.

The analysis underscores that, although not subject to the risks commonly associated with coastal destinations, Visit Emilia remains susceptible to rising temperatures, heightened pressure on water resources, the intensification of extreme weather events, and the vulnerability of certain mountain and hill ecosystems. Nevertheless, the region's diverse landscapes and tourism offerings play a crucial role in its resilience: the integration of cultural cities, culinary and viticultural excellence, natural areas, hiking trails, cycling routes, and spa resorts facilitates year-round tourism, thereby diminishing reliance on specific seasons or weather conditions.

**This internal analysis is already integrated into several of the destination's official planning instruments.** The 2026 Activity Plan, within the segment titled "Tourism as a Protagonist," identifies climate change as a significant challenge in trend analysis: the decision to prioritize the Apennines and natural areas during the summer, along with the **deseasonalization strategy** outlined in previous chapters, represents forms of adaptation that have already been incorporated into promotional efforts. The section focused on the Apennine area also details a specific operational action, albeit confined to the hiking sector: **trail management as a response to extreme weather events and collaboration with LAGs and Parks to bolster the resilience of the mountainous region.**

Furthermore, the **European D3HUB project**, focused on the digital and green transition of tourist destinations, offers tangible evidence of the destination's structural commitment to innovation and environmental sustainability. This initiative presented both a challenge in the pursuit of sustainability and an opportunity to bolster existing competencies. DTEmilias was chosen, alongside 39 other European destinations, to promote awareness of sustainable tourism practices and to enhance its capacity to utilize data in tourism promotion decisions.

The process entailed continuous dialogue with experts and the other participating destinations, resulting in the establishment of a platform that houses comparable data across the various entities involved. DTEmilvia was part of the Sustainable Emerging Destinations cluster and received particular support from Anysolution, the coordinating body of D3HUB. The regions of Trentino and Langhe Roero Monferrato were also represented on the Italian side, with whom we exchanged numerous opportunities for discussion regarding sustainability in tourism and data utilization.

**To support this analysis, the region can utilize existing quantitative public data: the ARPAE Climate Observatory** has maintained historical series since 1961 and municipal climatological tables for Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia, which are freely available for download and reuse under the CC BY 4.0 license, offering a robust foundation to further establish the destination's internal matrix.

## 7.6 Strategies for Climate Adaptation

In this context, **climate change adaptation** should be viewed not merely as a collection of sector-specific interventions, but **as an integrative process that encompasses destination governance, natural resource management, tourism planning, and the adaptability of tourism operators.**

### WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

One of the priorities pertains to water resource management: climate projections for the Emilia region suggest an increasing frequency of droughts interspersed with concentrated and intense rainfall, a scenario that necessitates heightened attention to water efficiency, particularly during peak tourism periods. The destination is dedicated to assuming a coordinating role, fostering the dissemination of water-saving practices in accommodation facilities, **promoting consumption monitoring, and advocating for the adoption of rainwater recovery and reuse systems, alongside awareness-raising initiatives directed at both operators and visitors.**

### ADAPTATION OF URBAN DESTINATIONS TO HIGH TEMPERATURES

A second area pertains to the adaptation of cities to heat: Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia, significant cultural centers, face growing challenges in providing adequate comfort during the summer months. **The availability of green spaces, shaded areas, protected pedestrian pathways, and access to drinking water** can not only alleviate the impacts of heatwaves but also enhance the overall quality of hospitality and tourism.

### THE RESILIENCE OF PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLING TOURISM

Particular attention must be directed towards tourism products that are directly influenced by the quality of the natural environment: hiking, cycling, and outdoor activities in the Apennines represent some of the fastest-growing segments, yet they are also among those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

It is essential to **enhance the monitoring and maintenance of the hiking and cycling network, improve user information systems, and incorporate climate risk assessment into the planning of new routes.**

## CONSERVATION OF NATURAL HERITAGE

Forest ecosystems, riparian zones, and hilly or mountainous terrains are essential in regulating local climates, safeguarding soil integrity, and preserving biodiversity. **Investing in their protection and restoration** not only maintains the environmental value of these areas but also enhances the conditions necessary for the sustainable development of nature and outdoor tourism.

## THE RESPONSE TO SEVERE CLIMATE EVENTS

The rising incidence of intense rainfall, localized flooding, and thunderstorms necessitates **enhanced collaboration among tourism management, civil defense, and regional planning. The establishment of unified procedures, operator training, and improved communication and alert systems will mitigate potential impacts** on visitors and economic activity.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXTENDING THE TOURISM SEASON

While climate change presents new risk factors, it also creates opportunities that destinations can capitalize on through a resilience-focused strategy. Extending shoulder seasons can facilitate a more equitable distribution of tourist flows throughout the year: food and wine, cultural, spa, and hiking tourism possess attributes that render them particularly effective in supporting this deseasonalization process, alleviating pressures concentrated in the summer months and generating broader economic benefits across the region.

**In addition to its internal framework and strategy, a destination can utilize at least four existing external tools to enhance its adaptation strategies.** At the regional level, the **"Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Management Systems"** for accommodation facilities aim to increase the number of establishments operating under eco-efficiency criteria. The **"Climate Action Plan for Tourism,"** developed by Clust-ER Tourism for the Emilia-Romagna Region, serves as a guide specifically for destination management organizations, outlining concrete actions such as the development of resilient infrastructure, emergency plans for extreme weather events, and the optimization of energy efficiency in accommodation facilities. Furthermore, the **Emilia-Romagna Region's Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy**, approved in 2018, includes a sector-specific risk matrix—encompassing tourism—upon which DTEmilias internal matrix can be further anchored.

At the national level, the **Minimum Environmental Criteria (CAM)** for construction, which are obligatory for all public procurements related to new construction, renovation, and maintenance of public buildings, encompass requirements for rainwater management, water conservation through dual-use networks, low-impact materials, and biodiversity protection. These climate adaptation measures are automatically implemented whenever a public tourism facility—such as IAT offices, Welcome Rooms, and museums—is constructed or renovated using public funds or through the PTPL.

In the medium to long term, the destination must persist in enhancing its adaptive capacity by incorporating climate resilience into planning decisions, investments, and promotional activities. The release of the climate risk and opportunity analysis, which completes the framework outlined here, remains one of the actions anticipated in the improvement plan (see section 8.3).



## 8 Management, monitoring and continuous improvement

The monitoring system, stakeholder transparency, and the enhancement plan.



Santiago Calatrava Project - Mediapadana High-Speed Station

REGGIO EMILIA

### 8.1 Surveillance system

**D**TEmiliana has established an operational monitoring system, rather than merely a planned one, utilizing various tools. The primary tool is the Data Appeal platform, which is employed to continuously assess sentiment and digital footprints—reviews, ratings, and comments—pertaining to operators across the three provinces, incorporating historical trends and a detailed analysis by product network, province, and facility type.

In 2025, two new modules were introduced within the platform: the socio-cultural sustainability index, which comprises the Cultural Index, Urban Green Index, Public Transportation Index, and Inclusivity Index, and the Spending module, which analyzes visitor expenditure based on aggregated Visa transaction data.

These tools, previously discussed in earlier chapters concerning the quality of the tourist experience and flow management, collectively form the informational foundation upon which the destination bases its strategic decisions and reporting processes.

## 8.2 Communication, transparency, and stakeholder engagement

In addition to the Transparent Administration section outlined in Chapter 3.1, the destination also communicates its sustainability initiatives to economic stakeholders and local communities through specialized tools.

These consist of a periodic report generated by the Data Appeal platform, specifically focused on "Visit Emilia's Sustainability," which offers stakeholders a succinct summary of the gathered indicators. This is further enhanced by a sustainability guide for operators, disseminated as part of awareness-raising efforts regarding energy, water, and responsible facility management, along with a database of events promoted by the destination, utilized for planning and communicating local initiatives.

Stakeholder engagement in establishing the sustainability pathway has been thoroughly detailed in chapters 3.2 and 3.3, to which we refer for a comprehensive mapping of the involved stakeholders and the activated participation tools.

## 8.3 Improvement plan: objectives, actions and indicators

| Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Indicator                                                                           | Target     | Person in charge                | Deadline   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|------------|
| Launch awareness-raising initiatives aimed at the relevant public transport authorities regarding transport to tourist sites, whilst reviewing the measures already in place at the Local Action Groups (GALs) and National Parks | Number of villages accessible by train or eco-friendly bus                          | 0.20       | Member local authorities        | 2,028.00   |
| To present the findings of surveys of residents in a format that is accessible to the local community, not just to professionals                                                                                                  | Number of visits to the website pages dedicated to surveys or social media profiles | +5/7%      | Ella Studio                     | 2,028.00   |
| To encourage the organisation of events in a sustainable manner by providing guidelines for their organisation and ensuring they are promoted as a priority via our communication channels                                        | Number of sustainable events per year                                               | 0.10       | DTEmilvia                       | Every year |
| Draw up a single document setting out the roles, responsibilities and communication channels for crisis management relating to visitors                                                                                           | Update and publication of the Civil Protection Plan                                 | three-year | Emilia Romagna Region           | three-year |
| Publish the annual report on the economic contribution of tourism                                                                                                                                                                 | Page dedicated to economic data on tourism in Emilia                                | annual     | Camera di Commercio dell'Emilia | by 2028    |

| Action                                                                                                                                                             | Indicator                                                                 | Target                                                                      | Person in charge  | Deadline   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Publish and regularly update the inventory of sites of relevance in terms of accessibility                                                                         | Number of accessible venues                                               | +3%                                                                         | DTEmilìa          | every year |
| Collect the ecological monitoring data still missing from the stakeholders involved in the tracking process                                                        | Number of forms collected                                                 | Reaching il 100%                                                            | DTEmilìa          | by 2028    |
| To promote the monitoring of water consumption in accommodation facilities, which is still significantly lower than that of energy consumption (see paragraph 7.3) | Information (provided by the operator) and training provided by DTEmilìa) | Improvement in the response rate to sustainability surveys among businesses | IRETI             | 2028       |
| To consolidate the percentage figures on renewable energy and green transport for the period 2025–2029                                                             | Number of eco-friendly facilities and modes of transport                  | +15%                                                                        | SETA – TEP - IREN | 2029       |
| Involvement of local schools and universities in tourism sustainability projects                                                                                   | Number of institutions involved                                           | 20% of the institutes                                                       | DTEmilìa          | by 2028    |

## 8.4 Validation and revision

In alignment with the GSTC certification process, the destination conducts an annual self-assessment of compliance (GSTC Destination Annual Self-Assessment), which must be dated and signed, and submitted to the certification body at least two weeks prior to the audit date. This dossier will be revised with the same annual frequency as outlined in Chapter 1, in accordance with the progression of the monitoring data and the advancement of the improvement plan actions.





## Sources and References

Documentary sources, data, and regulatory references utilized in the compilation of the dossier.

### **I**nstitutional accounts and data referenced in the text

- Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) — standards and criteria for destinations.
- Emilia-Romagna Region — tourism development, climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy (2018), regional legislation
- ARPAE Emilia-Romagna — Climate Observatory, waste web book, emissions and greenhouse gas inventory, water quality, and environmental data.
- Istat — statistics on demographics, employment, and lodging facilities
- Chambers of Commerce for Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia
- Municipalities of Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia — urban planning instruments (PUG), municipal environmental assessments
- Demoskopika Institute — Comprehensive Index of Tourist Overcrowding (ICST)
- Italia Nostra — Red List of Heritage in Peril
- Iren Group, Enel Green Power, and GSE — information on energy, water, and waste
- TEP S.p.A. and SETA — information on mobility and public transportation
- Infomobility Parma and TIL Econoleggio Reggio Emilia
- Clust-ER Tourism — Climate Action Strategy for Tourism
- Data Appeal Platform — sentiment analysis, sociocultural sustainability index, expenditure module
- Municipality of Parma, "Parma 2050: Approval of the New General Urban Plan" ([comune.parma.it](http://comune.parma.it))
- Municipality of Piacenza, official page "PUG - General Urban Planning Plan" ([comune.piacenza.it](http://comune.piacenza.it)); Piacenza Vision

The details regarding the specific regulatory references mentioned in the text (regional, national, and European laws) are available through Destinazione Turistica Emilia.

# EMILIA

La terra dello slow mix

*A distinctive region where  
gastronomy, nature, and culture  
converge:  
Parma, Piacenza, and Reggio Emilia  
are advancing towards sustainable  
and certified tourism.*

## DOCUMENT

Dossier elaborated by Virtou in  
collaboration with the staff of  
Visit Emilia



## TERRITORY

Parma · Piacenza · Reggio Emilia  
[www.visitemilia.com](http://www.visitemilia.com)

## REFERENCES

GSTC Destination Criteria  
UN Agenda 2030 · Sustainable  
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